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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**

**Experiencing Rhythm:  
Contemporary Malagasy Music and Identity**  
by

**Jenny Fuhr**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2010



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Doctor of Philosophy

EXPERIENCING RHYTHM:  
CONTEMPORARY MALAGASY MUSIC AND IDENTITY

by Jenny Fuhr

My thesis is about experiences of ‘rhythm’ in ‘Contemporary Malagasy Music’ (Randrianary 2001), a field that has hardly been researched. I argue for the importance of integrating musical practices into ethnomusicological research. Despite an on-going debate on the need for a more performative approach, only very few scholars have put this aim into action (Baily 2008). Most music research so far, particularly studies on African music, are marked by prevailing and dominating Western discourses on and approaches to music with musical notation remaining the main analytical tool. This has been criticised as a constant search for difference, ignoring indigenous theories and understandings of music (Agawu 2003) and for carrying the risk of ‘essentializing music’ (Bohlman 1993).

The challenge of competing discourses in my research becomes obvious with regard to ‘rhythm,’ a topic that seems to be the starting point for the musicians’ search for a collective identity for which music is a powerful tool (Stokes 1994, Frith 1996, Connell and Gibson 2003, Biddle and Knights 2007). In present day Madagascar where more and more musicians are transnationally connected (Kiwan and Meinhof 2011), but where musicians still struggle to access an international music market, questions of identity are regularly negotiated through the term and concept of ‘6/8 rhythm.’ Yet at the same time this term and concept is highly contested by the musicians as well. In Western music theory it is based on the idea of musical notation which at first glance seems to contradict the musicians’ emphasis on the Malagasy concept of oral tradition, the *lova-tsofina* (*lova* = heritage; *sofina* = ear) that many describe as the base for Malagasy music making.

In order to tackle this challenge and go beyond the study of seemingly contradictory discourses, I argue that we need to analyse discourses and musical experiences in a constant interrelation. My thesis therefore takes on an interdisciplinary perspective, combining ethnomusicological methods, referring to the so-called ‘new fieldwork’ (Hellier-Tinoco 2003), with a discourse analytical approach to interview data. I focus on individuals and individual experiences as proposed in Rice’s ‘subject-centred ethnography’ (Rice 2003) as it is only through creating a *shared* space of experience that encompasses the researcher and the researched in an equal manner (Rice 2003: 173-174) that we can implement a ‘*presumption of sameness*’ (Agawu 2003).

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## DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, **Jenny Fuhr**, declare that the thesis entitled

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and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission

**Signed:** .....

**Date:** .....



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*Fisaorana manokana ihany koa ho an'ilay tiako indrindra, izay nanohana ahy tamin'ny fony rehetra, natoky sy nampahery. Maivana dia maivana ny teny 'fisaorana' tsy mahalaza ny fankasitrahako ho valin'ny nataony rehetra.*





## Section 1 - Introduction

Compared to the music of countries on the African continent, Madagascar's music has not yet been intensively researched. Very little has been written about "Contemporary Malagasy Music" (Randrianary 2001) and scholars so far have mainly focused on specific regional musical phenomena (e.g. Edkvist 1997, Mauro 2001, Vatan 2004, Mallet 2000, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009), often with a particular emphasis on the notion of 'traditional music' (Schmidhofer 1995), or with regard to music embedded in functional contexts, such as spirit possession (Emoff 2002).

Most research on music so far is informed by a Western perspective, understanding and approach to music, with musical notation remaining the major analytical tool. The prevailing and dominating use of Western discourses on music in academia and hence the ignorance of indigenous understandings and theories has been criticised by scholars, such as Agawu (2003). Others draw attention to issues of power and propose to enquire who is in a position to control those discourses (Rice 2003). This is important because the exclusive use of Western music notation also carries the risk of "essentializing music" (Bohlman 1993).

My own research is situated in a context of competing discourses that could be described as a clash of epistemologies of how music is experienced. This becomes most obvious in the discourses on 'rhythm' in Malagasy music: My research starts with the observation that the topic of 'rhythm' is persistently present in the musicians' discourses and seems to be the starting point for their search for a collective musical identity. More precisely, it is the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' that is constantly used and yet highly contested as well. The presence of this particular term within the musicians' discourses becomes of particular significance as it is a term and concept that in Western music theory has grown out of and is based on the idea of musical notation (Arom 1991, Dudley 1996). However, at the same time Malagasy musicians refer to and emphasise the Malagasy concept of oral tradition, the *lova-tsofina* (*lova* = heritage; *sofina* = ear) as the base for Malagasy music making.

How can we draw any boundaries between these competing discourses? And how do we tackle the challenge of going beyond the study of these seemingly contradictory discourses in a search for other relevant criteria?

It is not only scholars who worry about the challenge of having to face different and competing discourses. The musicians, for example, express their worries about juggling with the foreign term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' and yet having the wish and aim to sell their music to an international audience. I argue that in order to tackle this challenge practically and analytically, we need to integrate discourses and musical practices in a constant interrelation. We need to focus on individual experiences, integrating the researcher's experience and those of the researched alike (Rice 2003) which allows for *shared* experiences that prevent us from imposing 'our theories' and let us follow what Agawu has suggested in his demand for a "*presumption of sameness*" (Agawu 2003). My thesis therefore takes an interdisciplinary perspective, combining ethnomusicological methods comprising fieldwork with ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and the analysis of musical practices, with a discourse analytical approach to interview data. I aim at analysing experiences of 'rhythm' by looking at the interplay of theories and musical practices, including the musicians' individual experiences as much as my own. However, 'theories' in this context should not merely be understood as ideas developed and expressed in an academic framework. Rather, it is about individual perspectives on how one 'theorises' music and one's own experiences of "musicking."<sup>1</sup> Searching for and listening to the musicians' own conceptualisations is therefore crucial (Agawu 2003). Many scholars have shown that music is a powerful tool when it comes to identity construction (e.g. Waterman 1990a, Stokes 1994, Frith 1996, Connell and Gibson 2003, Biddle and Knights 2007). Malagasy musicians are more and more transnationally connected (Kiwan and Meinhof 2011) and there are a considerable number of transnational/intercultural music projects in which Malagasy musicians are involved. At the same time, Madagascar is currently going through a severe political crisis and most musicians express their difficulties to make a living out of their music and regret that Malagasy music has not yet been successful on the international music market. In the current situation that holds as many chances as challenges for the musicians, questions of

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<sup>1</sup> Small (1998) proposes the new verb "to music" (with its present participle or gerund "musicking") as music in his opinion should be understood as an activity rather than a thing. He explains that his definition of "to music" goes beyond the meanings of "to perform" or "to make music": "To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" (Small 1998: 9).

identity are intensively debated. Musicians constantly bring up and reflect upon their search for identity, formulating ideas about a collective Malagasy music identity as much as pointing at regional particularities. ‘Rhythm’ plays a significant role in the musicians’ discourses and also within their musical practices.

In order to investigate the topic of ‘rhythm’ in Malagasy music within the context of this interplay, we need to reflect upon the following questions:

- What are the dominant discourses on ‘Contemporary Malagasy Music’?
- How do discourses and musical experiences interact/interrelate?
- How is ‘rhythm’ experienced in Malagasy music?
  - How do the musicians conceptualise ‘rhythm’ in their discourses?
  - How is the Western concept of ‘6/8 rhythm’ conceptualised in the musicians’ discourses?
  - How is ‘rhythm’ experienced through musical practices, especially through *shared* experiences of musicking?
- What role do experiences of ‘rhythm’ play in processes of identity construction?

It is within the following structure of my thesis that I develop my main arguments:

### Thesis structure

My thesis is divided into four sections: Following on from this first introductory section, section 2 consists of three chapters outlining and analysing my theoretical and methodological framework and approach. Section 3 equally comprises three chapters and presents my analyses. The fourth and final section presents the conclusion and discussion of my research.

## Section 2 – Theoretical and methodological framework

### Chapter 2.1

My research has grown out of previous studies in which I investigated the role of the Malagasy *Rarihasina* Cultural Centre in Madagascar’s capital Antananarivo. This previous work propelled my interest to focus more on the music itself. I place my

research in relation to the notion of “Contemporary Malagasy music” (Randrianary 2001) as it is closely linked to the Malagasy concept of *lova-tsofina* that so many musicians describe as the base for Malagasy music making. At first glance the musicians’ discourses on the importance of oral tradition seem to contradict their persistent use of the term and concept of ‘6/8 rhythm.’ To address this issue, I will begin by analysing in detail existing theories on ‘rhythm’ - a concept and term that in Western academia seems also far from clear and has caused much confusion and debate across the disciplines. Particularly in the field of African Music Studies the topic of ‘rhythm’ remains a central theme. Over the past decades numerous studies have been dedicated particularly to that topic (e.g. Brandel 1959, Chernoff 1979, Kauffmann 1980, Arom 1991, Temperly 2000), and scholars have invented a variety of terms and concepts specifically related to this topic. This has been criticised in no uncertain terms by Agawu (2003), who argues that so far all research in the field has been in a constant search for difference and ‘the Other.’ The topic of ‘rhythm’ also appears in the literature on Malagasy music. Scholars raise the issue of a rhythmic structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries (Randrianary 2001, Rakotomalala 2003) which is also a reoccurring topic within the musicians’ discourses and their musical experiences.

## Chapter 2.2

In my research I argue that it is important to look at the interrelation of discourses and musical practices. The so-called “new fieldwork” within ethnomusicology (Hellier-Tinoco 2003) demands a high degree of self-reflexivity and a focus on relationships, suggesting to understand ‘the field’ as an *experience* rather than a place (Hellier-Tinoco 2003: 25-26). This also draws the attention towards the individual and the individual’s experiences. Rice (2003) in his model of a “subject-centred ethnography” suggests a *shared* space of musical experience and ethnography that encompasses the researcher and the researched in an equal manner (Rice 2003:173-174). Although since the 1960s, and starting with Mantle Hood’s introduction of the concept of “bi-musicality” (Hood 1960), there has been a continuing debate within ethnomusicology on the importance of integrating musical practices into ethnomusicological research, Baily in 2008 still claims that hardly any scholar has put this aim into action. The reason for this he sees in the

problem of “perceived outcomes” in the academic context (Baily 2008: 135). Many ethnomusicologists emphasise that the “most satisfying knowledge” (Titon 1997) is often acquired through gaining musical experience. However, they mainly focus on the problems of integrating these experiences into the academic ethnographic report, and emphasise the difficulty of describing in words what one experiences musically (e.g. Seeger 1977, Rice 1997).

I argue that instead of seeing both as almost separated worlds, we need to look at them as interconnecting: at the ways in which our discourses inform our musical practices and how our musical practices inform our discourses. Focussing on individual experiences and analysing discourses and musical practices in a constant interrelation allows us to deal with, and challenge what appears to be competing discourses. It is through this integrative approach that we can create a *shared* space of experiences (Rice 2003) that will also support a “*presumption* of sameness” (Agawu 2003), an attitude of the researcher presuming sameness, rather than searching for difference and hence imposing a strictly Western perspective on the music.

### Chapter 2.3

Ethnographic fieldwork has been my main methodological tool. I have worked with Malagasy musicians in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, and with others who are based in Europe. At all stages of my research concerning both, discourses and musical practices, I have taken into consideration the particular research context which led me to reflect upon important factors, such as the role of the capital Antananarivo as a “cultural hub” providing important infrastructure (Kiwani and Meinhof 2011); my role as both researcher and musician; and the musicians’ aim at accessing the international ‘world music market,’ to name a few examples. I have also reflected on the fact that French – a second language for me and the musicians alike – constituted the main language of research.

This chapter takes the previously discussed methodological and theoretical issues onto a more concrete level. It accounts in detail for the development of my research and gives examples of situations that I encountered and experiences that I gained during my fieldwork.

### Section 3 - Analyses

Although for the purpose of structural clarity section 3 is divided into three chapters, with the first two presenting the analysis of the musicians' discourses and the third focussing on the analysis of musical experiences, the section needs to be understood and read as a whole. I analysed discourses and musical practices in a constant interrelation. The sequence of the chapters therefore does not represent any chronological or logical order of my research. Rather, the analysis of discourses informed my analysis of musical practices to the same extent as experiences informed the analysis of discourses. I will point at this constant interrelation especially in chapter 3.3.

#### Chapter 3.1 - Contesting the '6/8 rhythm'

Sociolinguists argue that language evolves according to peoples' need (Halliday 1978) and that it is used as the means through which we reflect upon ourselves and create position within our constantly changing social worlds (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005). Throughout the section I will analyse how musicians constantly negotiate questions of identity, moving within a continuum in which they draw references to the individual as to the collective, to the local as to the global.

Considering the emphasis that musicians place on the *lova-tsofina* as the base for Malagasy music making, at first glance the presence of the Western concept of '6/8 rhythm' seems striking. It is the most used and yet most contested term and concept within the discourses on Contemporary Malagasy music.

By integrating both, the analysis of discourses and musical practices, my aim is to go beyond the study of these seemingly contradictory discourses. Thus I do not try to find out or even judge whether the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' is right or wrong as a description of Malagasy music. Rather, I focus on and analyse the musicians' individual usage and understanding of the term. However, these individual experiences with this term and concept need to be contextualized within a multi-layered frame, which includes the musicians' bond to the capital Antananarivo, their aim to reach the international music market as well as my own role as a researcher and musician (see section 2).

By giving various examples from the interviews I conducted, I will show how the musicians' individual usage and understanding of the term varies and how this leads to even more terminological confusion. The fact that there is no institutionalised terminology on Malagasy music for the musicians to use becomes especially significant when considering their aim to enter the international 'world music market' and their individual strategies and ideas to reach that goal.

### Chapter 3.2 - Exploring the *lova-tsofina*: Musicians' theories on the origin and meaning of 'rhythm' in Madagascar

Within a context of competing discourses, and based on Agawu's demand for a "presumption of sameness" (Agawu 2003), I argue that it is immensely important to listen to the musicians' own voices and therefore search for and recognise the musicians' own concepts and understandings of their music. This chapter therefore explores in great detail the Malagasy concept of oral tradition, the *lova-tsofina* which many musicians describe as the base for Malagasy music making. I will analyse the musicians' discourses on the origin and meaning of 'rhythm' in Madagascar. Their individual conceptualisations of 'rhythm' reveal a wide ranging and yet highly interrelated set of different topoi: environment, everyday life, language, dance, influences from outside, and emotions and spiritual ideas. The division into these different topoi is merely for the purpose of analysis. All topoi are highly interrelated – a fact that I also stress in my analysis - and all of them underline the importance of the *lova-tsofina* that the musicians persistently emphasise. Within the different topoi, identities are constructed on various levels and musicians keep up a constant debate on sameness and difference, reflecting upon 'Self' and 'Other.' I especially analyse how perceptions of identities shift as comparisons are made between different regions of Madagascar, between Madagascar and the African mainland, or between Madagascar and the Western world.

### Chapter 3.3 - Experiencing Rhythm

Several Malagasy musicians say that they regret that those who write about music tend not to be musicians whereas musicians in turn do not write about music. Many also argue that there is a need to learn how to play Malagasy music in order to understand it. Within



the discipline of ethnomusicology there is also a continuing debate on the importance of integrating musical practices into ethnomusicological research (e.g. Baily 2008). Musical practices can give you a large area of common experience (Baily 2001: 96) and by integrating this *shared* space of musical experiences the research will encompass the researcher and the researched in an equal manner, focussing on the individual and the individual's experience (Rice 2003).

Three topics have come to the fore within the musicians' discourses on their own musical experiences: composing and 'malagasising'<sup>2</sup> music; tapping feet, counting, and clapping; and intercultural musical encounters. Throughout these topics, musicians constantly reflect upon the topic of 'rhythm' and negotiate questions of identity, again relating to the individual and the collective, the local and the global.

In this last chapter of section 3 I will demonstrate the importance of analysing the interrelation of discourses and musical practices by giving concrete examples that point at both directions: how discourses inform musical practices and how in turn, musical practices inform discourses. The integration of both allows us to tackle the challenge of competing or even contradictory discourses on music and acknowledges individual perspectives and experiences, including those of the musicians' as much as my own. I will particularly look at (contested) issues that have come up throughout my thesis, such as the '6/8 rhythm' and the Malagasy concept of *lova-tsofina*, or the structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries in the music. Using the interplay of individual 'theories' and musical practices brings important interrelations between various (musical) elements to the fore that would not have become obvious had I merely analysed the music from a Western perspective and used music notation as the main analytical tool. It is also these interrelations and interplays within the music and the experiences of music making that draw our attention to possible areas for further research, including questions of ways for studying regional particularities within Malagasy music with regard to 'rhythm.'

Recent research projects confirm the importance of integrating musical practices into our research and also point at further research areas and methods that become possible and especially fruitful concerning the topic of 'rhythm.' These include Stobart and Cross'

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<sup>2</sup> Many musicians used the French term 'malgachiser' in the interviews.

(2000) use of real-time measurement or Clayton, Saga, and Will's (2005) application of 'entrainment' to music studies.

#### Section 4 – Conclusion

Section 4 is the concluding section of my thesis in which I summarise and discuss my main arguments and findings. I further point at possible further research areas and questions, especially concerning the study of Malagasy music. This also includes possibilities of how my own research approach could be taken further, especially with regard to the integration of both, the analysis of discourses *and* musical practices.



## Chapter 2.1 – Theorising ‘rhythm’

- Introduction
- Literature review
- “Contemporary Malagasy music” (Randrianary 2001) and the *lova-tsofina*
- The ‘6/8 rhythm’ and the role of rhythm in the musicians’ search for identity
- Introduction: the concept of ‘rhythm’
- The concepts of ‘metre’ and ‘measure’ – different interpretations and understandings
- Rhythm in African music and the invention of new terms
- Example: Discourse on rhythm in Cuban music
- Rhythm in culture and language
- Malagasy rhythm(s)

### Introduction

The opening chapter of the first section deals with the theoretical and methodological context of my thesis, introduces the topic of ‘rhythm,’ and points at issues that have become the crux of my research.

I will first give an overview of the existing anthropological and musicological literature on Madagascar, placing my own research in relation to the notion of “Contemporary Malagasy Music” (Randrianary 2001) that is closely linked to the Malagasy idea and concept of oral tradition, the *lova-tsofina*. Many musicians describe the *lova-tsofina* (*lova* = heritage, *sofina* = ear) as the base for Malagasy music making. As this concept at first glance seems to contradict the musicians’ constant usage of the Western term and concept of ‘6/8 rhythm,’ I will analyse the different meanings and understandings of the concept of ‘rhythm’ as well as those of the concepts of ‘metre’ and ‘measure’ that seem to appear with regularity in all general discussions on rhythm within various academic disciplines. I will look in detail at theories on the discourses on African music and rhythm in which especially the focus on ‘otherness’ and the invention of new terms describing rhythmical phenomena appear as major issues. Further, I will discuss theories on rhythm

that point particularly at wide-ranging relations with other cultural topoi, such as language. Finally, I will analyse what has been said and written about rhythm(s) in Malagasy music in the existing literature.

### Literature Review

According to my own experience, Madagascar seems to epitomise for many people mainly chocolate and vanilla flavours and more recently also seems to be associated immediately with a two-part Walt Disney story in which a group of funny and likeable animals - that do not exist in real on that island - experience all sorts of adventures. The marketability of the name “Madagascar” is a topic also raised by many of the musicians I worked with and I will come back to this discussion later in section 3. German-speaking people further often take the word “Madagascar” as an invitation to start singing the folksong “Wir lagen vor Madagaskar,” telling the story of sailors whose ship run ashore and who had to watch each other die of Black Death. Not much more exhilarant is the association with pepper and the immediate reminder of the saying “Geh dahin, wo der Pfeffer wächst!” (“Go to the place where the pepper grows!”), a phrase expressing the wish to send someone away as far as possible.

The fourth biggest island of the world situated in the Indian Ocean off the Mozambican coast is well known for its nature and micro-climates with around 90 % of its flora and fauna being endemic and more and more new species being discovered regularly.<sup>3</sup>

Far less people know that the country is currently suffering from a severe political crisis as news coverage by Western media has been rather poor. The political tension and power struggle at the present time mirror former crises that the country went through since its independence from France in 1960 (such as in 1972, 1992, or 2002)<sup>4</sup>. Since the beginning of the year 2009 when opposition leader Andry Rajoelina started protests against President Marc Ravalomanana, the country has been in turmoil, causing severe

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org/xp/hotspots/madagascar/pages/biodiversity.aspx> (accessed 21.8.2010). See also for example the article from October 2010 by the BBC reporting the recent discovery of a new species of a carnivorous mammal in Madagascar: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth\\_news/newsid\\_9080000/9080783.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_9080000/9080783.stm) (accessed 3.11.2010).

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of the former political crises, see for example Randrianja and Ellis (2009).

social and economic hardship.<sup>5</sup> At the point of writing, the political situation has not been resolved and remains subject to unexpected change. Despite the fragmentary news coverage, the crisis has destroyed the island's image of a rather 'safe tropical paradise.' Private tourism operators reported an almost 100 % cancelation rate at the beginning of 2009 and in general, the crisis has brought a dramatic blow to the 390\$ million tourism sector.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, this situation has also affected the musicians I worked with in the capital Antananarivo, but also to some extent the Malagasy musicians based in Europe, for example in their not being able to return to Madagascar to give concerts. Only very few of the musicians I worked with can make a living out of their music or artistic performances. Most of them have additional jobs or other ways of income, and yet almost all of them consider themselves professional musicians. With the current crisis, life in general, but also music making has become even more difficult. I have stayed in touch with many of the musicians and was told over the phone and via email that at present time it is very difficult to perform in Antananarivo, not only as people have far less money to spend on cultural events and some of the already rare concert places have closed down, but people were also afraid for security reasons and tend to not leave houses in the evening anymore. I will come back to the role of the capital Antananarivo for the musicians and artists in chapter 2.3 where I talk about the development of my own fieldwork.

Many musicians actually bring up the topic of Madagascar's environment in their music and songs. They appreciate and praise the natural wealth, but also very often point at the dangers of human beings destroying the environment they live in and often live of. Ricky (alias Ricky Randimbiarison) is a singer and percussionist who is based in Antananarivo where he has founded the *Rarihasina* Cultural centre, a basis for workshops for students and other cultural activities (see Fuhr 2006). He regularly performs in Madagascar, but also in Europe, as a solo artist and in different small groupings. He often joins the group "Madagascar AllStars," who have as one of their permanent members the singer and

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<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the political events and the development of the crisis in English language, see for example: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/757fc6001cfc02cdd963ee3e68e6e0c7.htm> (accessed 19.8.2010).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL9665512> (accessed 19.8.2010).

guitarist Dama Mahaleo (alias Zafimahaleo Rasolofondraosolo). Dama Mahaleo also performs solo and with other groups, and in duo with singer and guitarist Erick Manana in Madagascar, Europe, or Canada. However, Dama Mahaleo is especially known for being a member of Madagascar's legendary group "Mahaleo" that was born out of the island's 1972 rebellion against the neo-colonial regime and that is still performing regularly, in Madagascar and also for Malagasy communities abroad.<sup>7</sup> Dama Mahaleo and Ricky, for example, have created a project called *Voajanahary* ("natural") which not only features both artists in musical performance, but also has the aim to create environmental awareness in Madagascar. Both artists have also participated in a campaign supporting the environmental policy of president Ravalomanana which was for the enlargement of protected areas of Madagascar which he presented at the "World Park' Congress" in Durban in 2003.<sup>8</sup> However, I have also realised that through songs, but also through announcements or discussions during concerts, musicians try to create more awareness for the Malagasy people and their culture, explaining (to a foreign or Malagasy audience alike) that Madagascar is not all about nature, flora, and fauna, but that more attention needs to be given to the people living on the island, to their culture, language, customs etc, but also to their problems and needs.<sup>9</sup> This observation made by the musicians could actually also apply to academic literature. Compared to research undertaken on the island's nature, there is far less literature concerning the people, culture, and society of Madagascar.

There is a vast body of French language colonial literature and also literature in English, Norwegian, and Malagasy from the same period. The "School of Oriental and African Studies" (SOAS, University of London), for example, with the "Hardyman Madagascar Collection" holds the largest personal collection on books about Madagascar in existence, donated by Mr. J.T. Hardyman whose parents worked for the "London Missionary Society" (nowadays: "Council for World Mission") and who himself lived in Madagascar

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on the group "Mahaleo," please see Meinhof (2005a); Rasolofondraosolo and Meinhof (2003). There is also a film about the group "Mahaleo" that was produced in 2005 by Marie-Clémence Paes, Cesar Paes, and Raymond Rajaonarivelo, Laterit Productions.

<sup>8</sup> Following this congress a film was produced by USAID called "Madagascar: a New Vision / Madagasikara: fijery vaovao." Subsequently two big concerts were performed on the same theme starring Ricky and Dama Mahaleo. Both, the film and the concerts finally were put together on the DVD *Ny dian'I Mananilatany*.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion on this topic, see Meinhof (2005a).

from 1946-1973.<sup>10</sup> Within colonial and missionary literature, Malagasy music only appears as a side topic, if at all.

The island's history has been discussed and analysed by different authors, the most important to be named are Hubert Deschamps (1972), Mervyn Brown (1979), and with the most recent publication "Madagascar: a short history" Randrianja and Ellis (2009). Particular political events or periods in the island's history have raised researchers' interest: during colonial times the influence of Protestant Missionaries (e.g. Bonar A. Gow 1980) or the Malagasy revolt against French colonial power in the 1890s (e.g. Stephen D.K. Ellis 1985); the country's socialist period under president Didier Ratsiraka from 1975-1993 (e.g. Ferdinand Deleris 1986; Roger Rabetafika 1990); but also the most recent political development since 2001 (e.g. Jean-Loup Vivier 2007). In general up till now, there is far more literature, anthropological studies included, in French than in English.

With regard to anglophone anthropological studies on Madagascar, a very prominent scholar is London Professor Maurice Bloch who since the late 1960s has published a considerable number of books and articles. Whereas his earlier works mainly concern the High Plateaux region and the *Merina* culture (Bloch 1968, 1971, 1986), more recent works by him focus on the *Zafimaniry*, a population living in the Eastern forest area of Madagascar (Bloch 1999, 2006). Scholars have focused on topics such as gender and social structure (e.g. Richard Huntington 1987); identity in connection with spirit possession (Lesley A. Sharp 1993); authority and fertility (Oliver Woolley 2002); the remembrance of colonialism (Jennifer Cole 2001), or power and development disconnect (Ritu Verma 2009). A significant publication is "Ancestors, power and history in Madagascar," edited by Karen Middleton and published in 1999. It is a collection of articles by scholars with expertise in different regions and who all reassess the importance of ancestors for changing relations of power, emerging identities, and local historical consciousness. In the introduction, Middleton writes that almost all ethnographic works published between 1970 and the early 1990s state that the relationship between the living and the dead is a key to power, fertility, and blessing in

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on the "Hardyman Madagascar Collection, see: <http://www.iias.nl/iiasn/iiasn4/iswasia/hardyman.txt> (accessed 18.8.2010).



Malagasy culture (Middleton 1999:1). Looking at publications since then, the importance of the ancestors continues to be emphasised (e.g. Sophie Blanchy et al. 2001, Raymond-William Rabemananjara 2001, Robert Dubois 2002), also in connection with the *famadihana*, the reburial of the ancestors (e.g. Pierre-Loïc Pacaud 2003) where music plays an important role, or in connection with *tsapiky* music, a genre from the South-West of Madagascar (Julien Mallet 2008 and 2009). The importance of the relationship to the ancestors also shines through in the musicians' discourses that I analyse in section 3, however rather indirectly, such as through the idea and concept of the *lova-tsofina* that I will explain below.

Within the anthropological literature, there are only very few works focussing on musical phenomena in Madagascar. In general and compared with other African countries, very little has been written on Madagascar's musical traditions.

The country's musical instruments have been described in several works, the most important to be named are Curt Sachs (1938), Gilbert Rouget (1946), Norma McLeod (1977), in addition to a book on organology by Silvestre Randafison (1980).

With regard to musical genres, the *hira gasy*, a peasant's music and theatre tradition from the High Plateaux region has been dealt with in three rather recent works by Ingela Edkvist (1997), Didier Mauro (2001) and Géraldine Vatan (2004). I will come back to this genre in section 3. August Schmidhofer (1995) has written a study on xylophone traditions in Madagascar with a particular focus on the African musical influences in the music and Marie Aimé Joël Harison (2005), in contrast, has put his focus on the European musical influences on Malagasy music. Other scholars have conducted research on particular regional music styles, e.g. Ron Emoff (2002) has described and analysed the possession music of Madagascar's East coast (*tromba*) and French ethnomusicologist Julien Mallet has published a number of articles on *tsapiky* music, already mentioned above (Mallet 2000, 2004, 2007, 2008) and his recent book "Le tsapiky, une jeune musique de Madagascar. Ancêtres, cassettes et bals-poussière" (Mallet 2009). More general works are Nora McLeod's article on the status of musical specialists in Madagascar (McLeod 1964) and a bibliography concerning ethnomusicological works on Malagasy music that has been published by Mireille Mialy Rakotomalala (1986) for the "Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie" in Antananarivo. The same author in 2003 has

published the book “Madagascar. La musique dans l’histoire,” that aims to describe the island’s music within its historical and socio-cultural contexts, emphasising for example the close relationship of music and everyday life. Another Malagasy scholar, Victor Randrianary, in 2001 published “Madagascar. Les chants d’une île,” a book that gives an overview of the musical traditions of the different regions, also focussing on its origins, and that likewise aims to understand the music embedded in its cultural contexts. Ulrike H. Meinhof (2005a), and Meinhof in collaboration with Zafimahaleo Rasolofondraosolo (2003, 2005b) have published various articles that deal with the experience of Malagasy popular artists in the diaspora. Following on from this, Meinhof continued to research Malagasy musicians’ transnational networks and in collaboration with Nadia Kiwan recently published a book on “Cultural Globalization and Music” looking at artists from both, Madagascar and North Africa (Kiwan and Meinhof 2011).

These works indeed research popular Malagasy artists, their focus, however, lies more on the artists’ networks, their diaspora experience and on the lyrics of their songs, but not so much on the music they create and play. In general, apart from Mallet’s studies of *tsapiky* music and some more general statements in the works of Rakotomalala and Randrianary, popular Malagasy music has not yet been a major focus in academic research.

Further, popular musical styles figure in around a dozen portraits of Malagasy musicians in the world music magazine *froots*, edited by Ian Anderson who is also the author of the chapter on Madagascar in the World Music Rough Guide (Anderson 1994a).

But then, what exactly do I mean when I speak of popular music or popular Malagasy artists?

#### “Contemporary Malagasy Music” (Randrianary 2001) and the *lova-tsofina*

The research for this thesis grew out of my previous research based on a three-month fieldwork in 2005 for my Master’s dissertation (SOAS 2006) in which I examined the strategies and personal experiences of a number of musicians working in and around the *Rarihasina* cultural centre in Madagascar’s capital Antananarivo. The centre was founded in the mid-1990s by a group of Malagasy artists, most prominently singer and percussionist Ricky (already named above), to create a Malagasy forum for artistic exchange and the preservation of the country’s heritage. The artists’ main aim was and

still is to become more independent from the dominant foreign institutions in a situation marked by almost complete absence of a state cultural policy. I will come back to how this previous research influenced and directed my fieldwork in Antananarivo in chapter 2.3 in which I discuss and reflect upon my own field research experiences in more detail. What surprised me at the time was the enormous variety of musical styles that I encountered which made it impossible to define this group of individual artists by looking at the musical styles they perform. Even the musicians themselves – and this is true for almost all musicians that I met throughout the last five years – have difficulties to explain their music or do not consider terms or categories, such as ‘traditional’ or ‘popular,’ appropriate for their own music. However, through my continuous ethnographic research over the past three years in which I focused much more on the music itself and especially in which I also engaged in musical practices myself, I came to understand the significance of the Malagasy concept of *lova-tsofina* that the musicians very often describe as the base of Malagasy music. It consists of the two words *lova*, meaning “heritage” and *sofina*, meaning “ear.” None of the musicians I worked with, except one or two, read or write music. The idea of the *lova-tsofina* is the oral transmission and it is not only described as a method to learn, play, and compose Malagasy music by many of the musicians, but even as a frame of mind (“état d’esprit”). Having understood the significance of the *lova-tsofina* for the musicians I worked with, I think that the music they play could best be understood and defined by the notion of “contemporary music” (“la musique contemporaine”) as used by Malagasy ethnomusicologist Victor Randrianary (2001). He describes “contemporary music” in the Malagasy context as an attitude of the musicians who embrace new musical forms and create musical syntheses while keeping and using their own tradition. He emphasises that ‘tradition’ here needs to be understood as inseparable from the notions of ‘creation’ and ‘openness’ (Randrianary 2001: 128).

Further aspects that the musicians share, such as their relation and bond to the capital Antananarivo will be discussed in chapter 2.3. There, I will also explain in detail how exactly during fieldwork I further developed my research questions and how I came to focus on the topic of ‘rhythm’ in my work. However, one seemingly contradictory issue

related to the *lova-tsofina*, I would like to present here as a starting point and crux for my research.

### The '6/8 rhythm' and the role of rhythm in the musicians' search for identity

One of my first observations when I started to focus on the music itself was that the musicians constantly talk about a rhythmic structure that they all share despite an enormous variety of regional musical particularities. As I will analyse in more detail in section 3, 'rhythm' seems to be the starting point for the musicians' search for a collective musical identity. Within their discourses about the shared rhythmic structure, the term '6/8 rhythm' persistently appears. At first glance, the constant usage of the term '6/8 rhythm' seemed contradictory to the idea of the *lova-tsofina*, considering that the concept of a metre in Western music theory, such as a '6/8 rhythm,' is profoundly based on the idea of notating and writing music. I will discuss this in more detail in the section on theories on rhythm below. There, it will also become clear that the meaning of the term 'rhythm' as such is already contested and understood in many different ways. The constant emphasis and appearance of both, the *lova-tsofina* and the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' within my research, has brought another important issue to the fore: the applicability and relevance of musical notation or transcription. This issue has not only gained importance with regard to the seeming contradiction between an indigenous concept of oral tradition and a Western concept that is rooted in musical notation. The musicians themselves reflect upon questions of musical notation, for example with regard to marketing strategies or experiences they have made through intercultural encounters as we will see in section 3, especially chapter 3.3. The issue of musical notation is also playing a crucial role with regard to my own musical practices as I decided *not* to use any musical notation or transcription to learn and play Malagasy music. This decision is based on and related to my experiences that I gained through both, engaging in and analysing the musicians' discourses *and* through engaging in and analysing musical experiences. This I will further explain with various examples throughout the thesis.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A small personal comment that I would like to include: I have sometimes felt almost uncomfortable and unsure that I will be handing in a PhD thesis about music that does not include any musical notation. This feeling was probably boosted by the fact that most works including those on African music (see discussion on theories on rhythm in this chapter), do include transcriptions in Western notation, or at least some sort of

In 1993, ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman in his article on “Musicology as a political act” argued that musicology<sup>12</sup> was going through a “political crisis” and “profound moral panic,” criticising in particular the constant attempt in musicology of “essentializing music” (Bohlman 1993: 419). To Bohlman each sub-discipline privileges different forms of essentialization, with the most wide-spread form being the persistent use of musical notation:

“By making and essentializing its object, musicology situates itself in a particularly Western position of wielding power. Notation, for example, becomes a convenient way of collapsing time and space, thereby removing all sorts of Others – Western and non-Western – to the plane of the universal. By rendering all musics in Western notation, one creates a universe of music and then succeeds in controlling it” (Bohlman 1993: 424).

Bohlman here raises the issue of power which he even emphasises more with regard to notation and music from oral tradition:

“By transcribing and notating music from oral tradition, we demonstrate our power and knowledge, but ipso facto keep the transmitters of oral tradition from acquiring the same measure of power” (Bohlman 1993: 424).

Bohlman’s arguments here mirror some of musicologist Kofi Agawu’s critique on the representation of African music in Western scholarship (Agawu 2003) and therefore show that up to date it has been an important debate. I will discuss Agawu’s arguments in the next chapters with regard to my methodological approach and reflections upon my

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transcription especially designed and invented to represent and describe a particular music or musical element. Comments on and questions about my work added to this unease. Bohlman (1993) within his critique on acts of “essentializing music” in the discipline of musicology makes the following remark: “I should even go so far as to say that there are times when musicology is driven by the fear that someone is ‘not really talking about ‘the music’” or, even more ludicrously, that an article or book does not use sufficient musical examples to be about ‘the music.’ Musicology students struggle under the prerequisite of finding enough ‘music’ to make their dissertations valid. Would that validity were only a matter of evidence about the domains in which musical practice takes place, for enough music inevitably means notated or notatable examples” (Bohlman 1993: 422-423).

I have to admit that I was surprised, if not a little bit shocked, that when I enquired about the possibility to hand in a CD/DVD with music examples with my thesis, different music colleagues and fellow students told me that this was rather an unusual request and I was given uncertain and even contradictory answers and questions. It was especially the issue of copyright that seemed to create uncertainty. My own enquiry about copyrights revealed as many different answers as emails I had sent out. The DVD that now accompanies this thesis therefore only includes my own recordings and recordings of musicians who gave me their permission to use them.

<sup>12</sup> Bohlman emphasises that ‘musicology’ as understood here also includes ethnomusicology, music theory and music criticism (Bohlman 1993: 418).

own research. There, I will also come back to questions of power, as I am bringing together and am using Timothy Rice's approach of a "subject-centred ethnography" (Rice 2003) and Agawu's demand for a "*presumption* of sameness" (Agawu 2003) - both authors who give the issue of power much attention, e.g. with regard to discourses being controlled or dominated.

Discussions on musical notation will appear many times throughout the thesis as much as ideas and experiences related to the *lova-tsofina*, as the musicians reflect upon and talk about it (see chapters 3.1 and 3.2), but especially as it has also been of crucial importance to my own musical experiences (see chapter 3.3).

The following discussion of theories on rhythm in Western academic disciplines (with a particular focus on the concept of 'metre') already shows that the idea of musical notation is inherent in many Western discourses.

#### Introduction: The concept of 'rhythm'

The ethnomusicologist Mieczyslaw Kolinski claims to have discovered some "fifty different meanings of the word 'rhythm'" (Kolinski 1973: 494). Numerous scholars throughout different disciplines point out the "terminological confusion" (Arom 1991: 182) and the number of terms describing somehow related or even similar concepts and meanings all linked to the general topic of rhythm seems endless. The author Apel even argues that "[i]t would be a hopeless task to search for a definition of rhythm which would prove acceptable even to a small minority of musicians and writers on music" (Apel 1946: 639, cited in Arom 1991: 186). Of particular interest to scholars of various disciplines have been the notions of 'metre' and 'measure.' They seem at the same time to be the concepts that have caused most discord among scholars. This, in turn, has resulted in a high number of different interpretations of these terms, especially among those who have looked at non-Western, particularly African music. Because of this discord and the many different interpretations, scholars have also invented a large number of new concepts and terms related to 'metre' and 'measure.' However, the usefulness of these new terms has been questioned and even strongly criticised by authors working for instance on African or Cuban musics. They argue that these newly invented terms rather emphasise stereotypes, such as African or Cuban rhythms always being

‘complex,’ and even more that they contribute to ideologies of difference by searching for and focusing on the notion of ‘otherness.’<sup>13</sup>

Many scholars from different disciplines also emphasise the close relation that rhythm has with language or other cultural aspects. Interestingly, the concepts and ideas of ‘measure’ and ‘metre’ seem to appear in all discussions on various aspects concerning the general topic of rhythm.

#### The concepts of ‘metre’ and ‘measure’ – different interpretations and understandings

A glance at the articles on ‘metre’ and ‘measure’ in the “The Oxford Companion to Music” (2002) already reveals a confusing aspect, which is the different usage in American and British English. The definition of ‘metre’ seems clear as the:

“[...] pattern of regular pulses (and the arrangement of their constituent parts) by which a piece of music is organized. One complete pattern is called a bar. The prevailing metre is identified at the beginning of a piece (and during it whenever it changes) by a time signature, which is usually in the form of a fraction; the denominator indicates the note-value of each beat and the numerator gives the number of beats in each bar.”<sup>14</sup>

The confusion starts with the notion of ‘bar,’ which in British English is used for the vertical line that is drawn through a staff or staves of musical notation, indicating division into metrical units. American English refers to this metrical unit as ‘measure’ and reserves the term ‘bar’ for what British English refers to as the actual ‘bar-line.’<sup>15</sup> The notion of ‘measure’ in British English, again, has a very particular meaning as a term referring to a specific moderately slow and stately dance in duple time of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> As we will see in what follows, many of the authors have a very particular and individual definition of these concepts. I will need to take these into account.

The ethnomusicologist Simha Arom, in his major contribution to the studies of African music, has paid a lot of attention to the notion of ‘measure.’ He writes that originally

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<sup>13</sup> See for example Agawu (2003) and Acosta (2005).

<sup>14</sup> Latham, Alison (2002): *Metre*. In: *The Oxford Companion to Music*. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed 11.06.09)

<sup>15</sup> *Bar*. In: *The Oxford Companion to Music* (2002) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed 11.06.09)

<sup>16</sup> *Measure*. In: *The Oxford Companion to Music* (2002) <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed 11.06.09).

‘measure’ was just a way of assembling a given number of beats that derived from what was known as ‘tactus’ in the Middle Ages (Arom 1991: 189). Since about 1600, however, the sense of the notion of measure as entities grouped as for instance 3/4, 4/4, or 6/8 with the underlying alternation of strong and weak beats has “sharply constrained all cultured Western music” (Arom 1991: 179-180). Van Leeuwen (1999) confirms Arom’s explanations. He writes that while during the Middle Ages ‘eternal’ time and plainchant dominated, in the Renaissance period music began to be divided and measured and composers introduced the bar line (Van Leeuwen 1999: 37). Hiley<sup>17</sup> also confirms that the earliest usage of bar lines can be found in music written in tablature in the early fifteenth century. He further writes that even until the sixteenth and seventeenth century, bar lines did not always immediately precede the main accented beat. The first beat of the bar and the strong beat therefore did not necessarily always coincide. It was only after the mid-seventeenth century that it became the rule to precede main beats with bar lines. Arom remarks that all definitions in dictionaries as well as education at music schools and conservatories have been and still are based on a contrast between strong and weak beats in music (Arom 1991: 180). He also analyses several definitions of ‘measure’ by various authors, as for instance Kolinski (1973), Chailley (1951), Cooper and Meyer (1960) or Herzfeld (1974) and comes to the conclusion that all of them “provide for accentual ranking within the measure” (Arom 1991: 187). Dudley also agrees that Western musicians and Western music listeners assume that metric pulses were consistently accented, for instance the first note in a 3/4 metre or the first and fourth note in a 6/8 metre (Dudley 1996: 272). Arom’s critique goes even further. He argues that for most authors accentuation is actually the foundation of rhythm and only the presence of accents in itself implies the existence of rhythm (Arom 1991: 187). ‘Rhythm’ and ‘metrics’ are thus inconceivable without each other (Arom 1991: 184). Although most of the authors see difficulties in adopting this interpretation of rhythm and in particular that of measure to non-Western musics, especially when it comes to music transcriptions, some also see its limits regarding Western music.

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<sup>17</sup> Hiley, David: *Bar*. In: *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/01972> (accessed 11.06.09).



Dudley (1996), for example, argues that European music definitely has more variety of rhythmic feel than what can be explained by concepts such as 3/4 or 4/4. He underlines this with the example that “a waltz feel” already says much more about the musical character of a piece than simply saying that a piece was in a 3/4 metre (Dudley 1996: 274). These remarks about the interpretation and use of ‘metre’ founded in Western music culture seem to be the starting point for many critiques, in addition to some new concepts and terms, which I will now analyse in more detail.

Martin R.L. Clayton (1996) has undertaken research on ‘free rhythm.’ Although his study refers to music *without* metre, he makes, however, some important remarks about the usage of the concept. He criticises both, the presumption of a given particular accentual ranking and the presumption that all pulses are temporally equal:

“The terms ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ beats will almost certainly prove inappropriate to many musics; we cannot assume the temporal equality of pulses; neither can we assume that a periodic pattern necessarily begins or ends at any particular point (that there is a ‘beat one’)” (Clayton 1996: 328).

Although he offers a large variety of examples of ‘free rhythm’ from around the world, he criticises other scholars’ neglect of studying ‘free rhythm’ (Clayton 1996: 323). He has found several reasons for this, the main ones being the absence of concepts and methods in (Western) musicology that account for the existence of metre, and the fact that our musical perception and analytical thinking therefore developed largely through the study of metric musics. In addition, ethnomusicologists so far have not yet reported any indigenous theories about ‘free rhythm’ (Clayton 1996: 326-327). Clayton’s argument is that all ‘metrical systems’ have in common that they depend on pulsation. ‘Metres’ repeat and therefore create periodicity through which they become a framework for rhythmic design. Terms such as ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ beats are, however, misleading since patterns are not necessarily marked by dynamic accenting or de-accenting. He therefore suggests thinking of metre as a “cognitive representation” rather than an objective quality of the music itself (Clayton 1996: 328).

Several authors who work on African music go one step further by saying that these terms are not only misleading, but that time signature and the contrast of strong and weak beats actually lack a way to differentiate between the many patterns of accents that are possible in a musical period. And that in much African music, for instance, main beats

although being conceived, are actually not audibly accented (Dudley 1996: 272). Arom refers to this phenomenon as “abstraction of the notion of metre and strong beats” (“abstraction de la notion de mesure et du temps fort”) (Arom 1984: 6). Dudley concludes that metre is therefore something entirely separate from rhythmic accent and that African musicians have many different kind of metres that can be described for example as a 4/4 measure (Dudley 1996: 273). Arom also comes to the conclusion that rhythmic systems in African music make no use of the notion of ‘measure’ and the associated feature of ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ beats. In order to have an accurate description of these systems, he asks to develop “a precise and univocal vocabulary, i.e. one in which the meanings of two terms never overlap” (Arom 1991: 201). He therefore promotes the notion of ‘pulsation’ rather than using the term ‘measure’ that has grown out of a long established Western musicology:

“Pulsations are an uninterrupted sequence of reference points with respect to which rhythmic flow is organised. All the durations in a piece, *whether they appear as sounds or silences*, are defined in a relationship to the pulsation” (Arom 1991: 202).

From his point of view, pulsation is not equivalent to rhythm. Rather, for there to be rhythm, “sequences of auditive events must be characterised by contrasting features.” He recognises three different features through which this can happen:

- 1.) by accents
- 2.) by tone colours
- 3.) by durations

Considering all possible combinations of these three features, Arom concludes that there are nine different ways to create rhythm. And this is when his concept of ‘metre’ comes into play: One of the combinations, namely that of identical durations with regular accentuation, he identifies as ‘metre’ and suggests that “what is called metre in music is thus the simplest form of rhythmic expression” (Arom 1991: 202-203).

Gerhard Kubik (1969, 1974) a scholar who similarly has contributed to African music studies, also takes up the notion of ‘pulsation.’ In contrast to Arom, he writes that especially in several forms of instrumental African music, musicians refer to two, three, or even four, ongoing pulsations (Kubik 1969: 57, cited in Arom 1991: 210). This implies

the absence of a common guide-pulse as a reference points by all players and means that each player relates his or her part to individual reference pulses which can stand in various relations to each other. Scholars usually refer to this as ‘interlocking’ (Kubik 1974: 247, cited in Arom 1991: 210).

### Rhythm in African music and the invention of new terms

The question whether Malagasy music can or should be categorised as African music is a difficult debate. According to my own experience, in Western music shops, in music magazines, or on music internet sites, it is usually classified under the header of ‘Africa,’ probably mainly through its geographical position. However, looking at the musicians’ discourses, the question seems far less clear. Identities and questions of belonging rather constantly shift as we will see in my analyses in section 3. Generally, I have made the experience that people from the High Plateaux region tend to establish a border between Africa and themselves, emphasising that people from this region were descendants of Indonesian people, whereas Malagasy people from the coast (“Côtiers”) are more likely to be descendants of former African slaves. I will come back to the conflict-ridden relation between High Plateaux people and *Côtiers* in section 3.<sup>18</sup>

As already seen above, many scholars, especially those studying African musics, have invented new terms and concepts they find more appropriate for their subject of study.<sup>19</sup> Whereas some of these concepts and terms have been taken up in wider scholarly discussions like the idea of ‘interlocking,’ others have never made their way beyond the original work in which they were invented. The biggest critique on all these newly invented concepts specifically for African music has come from Princeton musicologist Kofi Agawu. He has conducted much research on African music, especially about his home region in Ghana, but is also a classically trained scholar of Western musicology. In his book “Representing African Music” published in 2003 he criticises in no uncertain

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<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of the old conflict between the High Plateaux and the “Côtiers” and especially how it acquired a particular political salience in the twentieth century since the French colonisers had made use of the established power structures of the Merina to rule the island, please see Deschamps (1972).

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Blum (1991) in his article on “European Musical Terminology and the Music of Africa” examines problems that arose as European terminology was applied to African music by early comparative musicologists towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly looking at the works of E.M. Hornbostel and concepts, such as ‘musical system’, ‘musical thinking,’ ‘motive,’ or ‘melodic motion.’

terms numerous scholars who have worked on music in different regions of Africa. His main point of critique concerning the topic of rhythm is already well summarised by the title of one of his chapters, “The Invention of ‘African Rhythm.’” He explains that rhythm and the particular complexity of rhythm has been brought up so consistently as a central theme throughout the discourse on African music that it is now taken as a commonplace:

“That the distinctive quality of African music lies in its rhythmic structure is a notion so persistently thematized that it has by now assumed the status of a commonplace, a topos. And so it is with related ideas that African rhythms are complex, that Africans possess a unique rhythmic sensibility, and that this rhythmic disposition marks them as ultimately different from us” (Agawu 2003: 55).

Based on the argument that rhythm was the most sensationalised parameter in African music, Agawu depicts several problems. The first problem is that African music supposedly constitutes a homogenous body. Agawu explains his critique by using different perspectives. Whereas in the quote above he speaks from a Western researcher’s point of view (by stating “different from *us*”), a few pages ahead he speaks from the perspective of someone from the African continent, using exactly the same argument: “*Our* complex and diverse continent is virtually unrecognizable in the unanimist constructions employed *by some researchers*” [Emphasis mine] (Agawu 2003: 59). ‘Africa’ as such cannot be grasped as a unified cultural phenomenon or a fruitful epistemological referent, he further argues. This false idea creates another severe problem which is the retreat from comparison (Agawu 2003: 60).

“The choice of an appropriate comparative frame is already ideological. Indeed, a determined researcher could easily show that the sum of isolated experiments in rhythmic organization found in so-called Western music produces a picture of far greater complexity than anything that Africans have produced so far either singly or collectively. One could, in short, quite easily invent ‘European rhythm’” (Agawu 2003: 61).

‘African rhythm,’ Agawu argues, is therefore to be called an “invention, a construction, a fiction, a myth, ultimately a lie” (Agawu 2003: 61). Agawu agrees with other scholars that the semantic field of rhythm is not a single, unified, or coherent one, but rather permanently entangled with other discourses, such as the Western music being

“balkanized into separate domains” (Agawu 2003: 61, 63). Agawu demands an ideology of difference to be replaced by an ideology of sameness “so that – and this is somewhat paradoxical – we can gain a better view of difference” (Agawu 2003: 67). I will come back to this demand for an ideology of sameness in the next chapter as I consider it part of my main theoretical and methodological framework. He gives the example of the problems that come with notating music and argues that Western music actually suffers from being notated in the way that it has been notated so far. If there is a new way for notating music to be developed, it should be developed for both, African and Western music (Agawu 2003: 64). The question of how to notate African music has, however, led to the creation and invention of a large number of new concepts and terms. I will now present a few that are related to my own topic.

Agawu writes that in all the theories about African rhythm that advanced during the twentieth century, “basic questions remain as to where the beat is, what constitutes a pattern, whether meter exists, how many meters are in operation within a given composition, how to notate rhythm, and so on” (Agawu 2003: 71). Surprisingly, there is hardly any agreement of the organising principles in African music. Hence, the retreat from developing a general theory has in turn facilitated the propagation of these new terms (Agawu 2003: 71-72). Right at the beginning of his chapter entitled “Polymeter, Additive Rhythm, and Other Enduring Myths” Agawu presents a list of no less than 38 new terms that have appeared in the literature so far. He argues that

“[e]ach of these terms has a history, a logical place within an economy of technical terms, and a range of intertextual resonances. Some are descriptively transparent (Kolinski’s ‘contrametric accent’), some are locked in an active binary (‘free rhythm’ versus ‘strict rhythm’), while some speak of American imposition (‘hot rhythm’). Although a full understanding requires much attention to contexts, origins, and influence, it is probably fair to say that no other dimension of African music has elicited more eagerness to name and rename” (Agawu 2003: 72-73).

The notions of ‘polyrhythm’ and ‘polymetre’ are widely used and very well known among scholars. Arom’s major publication with more than 600 pages on African music is even entitled “African polyphony and polyrhythm.” ‘Polyrhythm’ is understood as the simultaneous use of two or more contrasting rhythms in a musical texture (Agawu 2003: 79). It has to be distinguished from ‘polymetre’ which is the

“[...] simultaneous use of more than one meter in an ensemble composition. Each functional component of the texture, be it an instrument or a group, is said to expose a distinct rhythmic pattern within its own metrical frame, apparently without any obvious regard for a larger coordinating mechanism. Constituent meters do not collapse into each other or into a larger meter, but persist into the background, creating a kind of metric dissonance or metric polyphony. Philosophically, polymeter indexes coexistence, not (necessarily) cooperation” (Agawu 2003: 79).

Although Agawu still questions the term ‘polyrhythm,’ he argues that the phenomenon it describes is easily grasped and that it also exists in European music. The degree of repetition inherent in African polyrhythm might, however, make a difference: “What perhaps distinguishes the African usages is the degree of repetition of the constituent patterns, the foregrounding of repetition as a *modus operandi*. If this counts as a difference, it is one of degree, not of kind” (Agawu 2003: 81).

In contrast, Agawu sees many reasons why to reject the notion of ‘polymetre.’ His first argument is that there are no indications that polymetre is relevant in the discourses among African musicians who are the actual “carriers of the tradition.” Although some ideas of metre are recognised in some indigenous discourses (e.g. where dancers put their feet), there is no evidence of the simultaneous use of different metres which shows that polymetre has been imposed on African music. His second argument is that almost all African ensemble music which is said to have polymetric features is dance music. But choreography demands a grounding, so that strictly speaking there is only “one ‘rhythm’ of the dance.” Further, polymetre fails to convey the accentual structure in African music in which phenomenal accents (as opposed to metrical accents) play a more important role. There is a tension between a firm and stable background and a fluid foreground in African music; polymetre would simply erase this tension (Agawu 2003: 84-85).

Scholars working on African music have given their attention to another term: ‘additive rhythm’ as opposed to ‘divisive rhythm.’ ‘Additive rhythm’ describes a pattern in which non-identical or irregular durational groups follow one another. A single 12/8 bar, for example, may be divided additively into 5+7 or 3+2+2+5, but *not* into 3+3+3+3.

‘Additive rhythms’ can appear within one bar or between bars or groups of bars. The distinction between ‘additive’ and ‘divisive’ rhythms was first made by Curt Sachs who understands the first ones as “rhythms of the body” that were specifically designed for

dance and became dominant in European music from the seventeenth century onward. The latter he thinks of as “rhythms of speech” as he sees their origin in language and the asymmetrical periodicities in speech. Sach’s term became prominent within the ethnomusicological discourse on African music through his student Rose Brandel (Agawu 2003: 86-87).

Brandel (1969) has developed the concept of the “African Hemiola Style.” She argues that African music is always based on duple and triple rhythms. However, there is one distinction to be made, namely between “vertical hemiola” and “horizontal hemiola.” The first one describes what in Western music is often referred to as hemiola, namely triple rhythms sounding against duple rhythms. The latter means that the ‘conductor’s beat’ frequently changes from triple to duple rhythm. In this horizontal hemiola

“[...] the change in the conductor’s beat occurs in a short time span, as in a regular change from 6/8 to 3/4 or on frequent changes in meter: 5/8, 7/8, 8/8; at other times the hemiola will be wide-spread and sectional with several measures being in 3/4 and another section being in 6/8 or other configurations” (Kauffman 1980: 397-398).

Kauffman (1980), who has reassessed various theories on African rhythm, sees some potential as well as some weakness in Brandel’s approach. On the one hand, her distinction of horizontal and vertical hemiola opens up the possibility of dealing with both, polyrhythmic relationships and individual patterning. He also positively remarks Brandel’s focus on the duple and triple changes as this is something central to all African music, which can also be used for many other musical areas in the world, such as the additive rhythms of Eastern Europe or the Middle East or the divisive rhythms in Western music. One of the weaknesses Kauffman remarks is that Brandel reduces African music to Western notation which he regards as a result of her lack of experiences in African music. He therefore concludes that “even though Brandel’s theory has potentialities for a total explanation of the *gestalt* of African rhythm, its realization seems to be inadequate” (Kauffmann 1980: 398). A much stronger critique on her approach comes from Agawu who has analysed many of her transcriptions of African music. Not only that she mainly transcribed from recordings and never had “the benefit of seeing the music and hearing the dance” (Agawu 2003: 90), but one of her main mistakes by transcribing the music is that she placed a bar line before any perceived accent which then produced “some

unfortunate results” (Agawu 2003: 90). His main critique, however, is that she ignores the African musicians’ own perceptions of their music.

“Brandel’s Stravinsky-style scores confer an enviable complexity on ordinary African dance music, but they do not reflect the way African musicians conceive of their music. A Mangbetu woman dancing (...) is unlikely to think in terms of 3/8 followed by 5/16 followed by 6/16, then 7/16 then 3/8” (Agawu 2003: 90).

As I will discuss in detail in the next chapter in which I present my theoretical and methodological approach, my main aim has been especially the focus on the musicians’ *own* perceptions and understandings of their music. I have not in any way tried to explain Malagasy music from a Western musicological perspective, but have rather analysed the musicians’ own discourses and musical experiences including my own musical practices. This, for example, has made me aware of and made me use the Malagasy idea and concept of *lova-tsofina*.

Brandel is not the only one who claims African music to be additive. The Ghanaian musicologist Nketia (1974), for example, says that “the use of additive rhythms in duple, triple, and hemiola patterns is the hallmark of rhythmic organization in African music” (Nketia 1974: 131). Interestingly, Nketia is also quoted by Arom in order to underline his argument *against* the usage ‘additive rhythm’ as he writes that “[t]he African learns to play rhythms in pattern” (Nketia 1963:10, cited in Arom 1991: 207). The fact that rhythmic formulae are learnt as a whole without being broken down into single constituents seems for Arom to be the proof that terms such as ‘additive’ or ‘divisive’ rhythms actually do not make any sense for African music (Arom 1991: 207).

Yet another term seems to have gained importance within the discourse on African music, namely ‘cross rhythm.’ The idea of this concept is that two different rhythmic patterns unfold in the same time span. An example would be a musician who beats two equal beats with the one hand, and three equal beats with the other hand within the same time span, i.e. one hand in 6/8 the other in 3/4 (Agawu 2003: 92). Agawu ironically remarks that this was so much a part of the lore on African rhythm that “it would seem almost perverse to question it” (Agawu 2003: 92). He argues that it seems very unlikely that the musician think of this time span as being divided and that therefore the resultant pattern, namely the 6/8, holds the key for understanding. If someone says he or she is performing in ‘cross rhythm’ it actually means that it is a performance in a 6/8 metre.



Yet, he admits that it is nevertheless worth looking at different hand movements in order to think about the possibility of independent articulation:

“It is true that the resultant is articulated with timbral distinction between left and right hands, and that looking at what the hands play separately may encourage thinking in terms of independent articulations. But there is no independence here, because 2 and 3 belong to the same Gestalt” (Agawu 2003: 92).

Agawu draws some conclusions from his harsh critique on all these invented terms and concepts for African music. He argues that the persistency of these terms in the literature on African music can be interpreted in two different ways: It is a discourse on ‘Africanism,’ as there is one on ‘Orientalism,’ indicating “those nuggets of African cultural identity that survive in the New World” (Agawu 2003: 95). Or, these terms need to be regarded as inventions and myths; as “power-based constructions of knowledge motivated in part by a search for self through imagined differences” (Agawu 2003: 95). He further argues that it is “fashionable” to invoke such constructs, such as ‘Orientalism’ or ‘invention.’ The cause for “these sorts of errors” lay in inadequate research, as for instance if ethnographic data is insufficient, indigenous conceptions are disregarded, or hasty conclusions are made. Agawu then goes one step further by suggesting that these errors are also made in other musicological research and are not unique to research on African music. Within this thought, however, he depicts a bigger problem, if not the source of all problems, namely that there always has to be a notion of ‘otherness’ with regard to Africa:

“But therein lies the root of the problem: *the denial of nonuniqueness to Africa*. To imply that no portrayal of Africa is legitimate, complete, or of interest if it does not establish an ultimate African difference is to saddle Africa with an enormous critical burden” (Agawu 2003: 95).

Looking at literature on other, non-Western music, as for instance Latin American music, quite similar schemes appear which might question Agawu’s critique that it was Africa alone that was carrying this “enormous critical burden” (Agawu 2003: 95). Within discourses on other musical regions, there also seems to be a strong focus on rhythm which has been criticised and questioned with quite similar ideas. One example is the discourse on rhythm in Cuban music.

### Example: Discourse on rhythm in Cuban music

Leonardo Acosta (2005), who is a journalist, writer, poet, and also a musician, develops in “On Generic Complexes and Other Topics in Cuban Popular Music” new approaches to the history of Cuban popular music. His main critique is that “many myths” have been created, as for instance the one of “new rhythms” and their supposed “creators” (Acosta 2005: 228). Similar to Agawu, Acosta points out the tendency to create the idea of Cuban rhythms to be highly complex and hardly to be understandable by Westerners. He speaks of “three main historical pillars” of popular danceable Cuban music, namely the *rumba*, the *son*, and the *danzon*. There are, however, many variants, as well as subgenres, different styles and even “intergenres.” One day, someone named these different genres “complexes” (*complejos*) and this finally turned into a dogma. The term is used by authors from Cuba and other Spanish-speaking countries without anyone ever having further analysed or critically reflected upon it. Acosta writes that “[c]omplex is almost always a synonym for ‘complicated’” (Acosta 2005: 228-229). Exactly this emphasis on complexes, he argues, has at least two serious negative consequences for the research conducted on Cuban popular music. Firstly, this concept breaks up and somehow compartmentalises the music into segments which Acosta describes “like ghettos” with the result that the “underlying unity of our danceable music and its essential African quality based on common Caribbean roots is obscured” (Acosta 2005: 232). His second point of critique goes into a similar direction. He speaks of basic rhythmic patterns of the existing “primary genres.” Respecting this base, one cannot separate rhythm patterns as if they were totally independent entities. The best proof for this are the musicians themselves as they show very obviously the falsity of this theoretical compartmentalisation by going from one rhythm to another and/or combine them which is very well possible as these rhythms come from the same roots (Acosta 2005: 233). Acosta therefore concludes that “[t]he ‘complexes’ actually conceal the unity of Afro-Caribbean rhythms” (Acosta 2005: 243). Similar to Agawu, Acosta therefore promotes that the musicians themselves and their own musical experience should be regarded as the ultimate ‘authority.’ I have tried to get as close as possible to this demand by integrating both, the analyses of discourses and the analysis of musical experience as I will argue in the next chapter.

### Rhythm in culture and language

As stated above, the term 'rhythm' has not only created confusion and discord among scholars conducting musical analyses. Many different theories and ideas have been developed, for example, about rhythm embedded in culture or language. Interesting in this respect is, again, the focus on the concepts of 'metre' and 'measure.'

Justin London (2004) has developed a definition of metre which runs against most of the other understandings of metre that I have discussed so far. Instead of only asking 'What is metre?' he finds it useful to instead think of 'What is metre *for*?' He argues that metre is perceived as both, "for something" as well as part of something. For something, since metric counting can help musicians hear how the music should go. But metre is also perceived as part of the music's feel or the music's groove. When a musician is playing according to a particular metre, it means that he or she is giving a series of tones a certain rhythmical shape and nuance. If the same series was played under a different metre, the expression of timing and dynamics would be different as well. London therefore sees a necessity to make a very clear distinction between 'rhythm' and 'metre.' 'Rhythm' is about patterns of duration, often called 'rhythmic groups.' These patterns are not based on the actual duration of each musical event as rhythmic patterns can be played, for example, legato or staccato. In his view, 'rhythm' involves more the structure of temporal stimuli, whereas 'metre' involves our perception and our cognition of these stimuli.

'Metre,' in contrast to 'rhythm,' involves "our initial perception as well as subsequent anticipation of a series of beats that we abstract from the rhythmic surface of the music" (London 2004: 4) With reference to Gjerdingen (1989) he puts it in the following way:

"if 'meter [is] a mode of attending,' then rhythm is that to which we attend" (London 2004: 4). In order to emphasise this point, he gives a very detailed definition and a "guiding hypothesis" of his understanding of 'metre':

"[...] meter is a particular kind of a more general behaviour. The same processes by which we attend to the ticking of a clock, the footfalls of a colleague passing in the hallway, the gallop of a horse, or the drip of a faucet also are used when we listen to a Bach adagio, tap our toes to a Mozart overture, or dance to Duke Ellington. As such, meter is not fundamentally musical in its origin. Rather, meter is a musically particular form of *entrainment* or *attunement*, a synchronization of some aspect of our biological activity with regularly recurring events in the environment" (London 2004: 4).

This understanding of metre mirrors the theories of some of the musicians that the Malagasy rhythm is inherent in everyday life as I will discuss in chapter 3.2. They say that the rhythm can be heard in everyday activities, such as the pounding of rice, the bus drivers' shouting to gather passengers, or the zebu cows pulling the cart.

London speaks of 'metric behaviours' and argues that these are learned, rehearsed, and practiced. He emphasises this idea by saying that musical rhythms are often stereotypical, stylistically regular, and hence familiar. What happens therefore is that "we fit, so to speak, patterns of events in the world to patterns of time we have in our minds" (London 2004: 4). 'Metre' is therefore more than a part of "representation of reality." It should be understood as "entrained behaviour." By this, he means for instance the "moving with the music;" the fact that it engenders and encourages our bodily movements, as for instance tapping our toes, dancing etc. These "behaviours," he argues, are practiced from earliest childhood and although there are differences between every person concerning rhythmic sensitivities and/or abilities, to some extent everyone can run, walk, listen to or perform. Further, the capacity for entrainment is universal. Metre is always, in all cultures and in all contexts, subject to the same basic formal and cognitive constraints. The rhythmically regular patterns will tend to give rise to similar metrical structures and similar musical effects (London 2004: 4-6). 'Metrical entrainment' for London is also about a "complex matching of listener expectations to hierarchical structured patterns of temporal invariance that are characteristically present in the music" (London 2004: 143). This means that performers and most listeners are very familiar with at least some specific styles and performers and through this context of concrete knowledge and experience their "metric skills" are formed and honed (London 2004: 143).

About fifty years earlier, Richard Alan Waterman (1952) introduced the term 'metronomic sense,' suggesting a quite similar approach to metre as something deeply embedded and learnt in culture. Applying the term to African music, he aims to describe the sense that is "at the basis of African rhythm" [...] "This sense is part of the 'perceptual equipment' which musician and listener share, having acquired it in the process of assimilation to their own culture." Therefore he also refers to it as "cultural pattern" (Waterman 1952, cited in Arom 1991: 181). Waterman proposes one particular method in order to find out about this 'cultural pattern,' namely to let the musicians do

hand clapping to a recorded piece (Arom 1991: 111). London reflects on a same kind of method. He argues, however, that it is still an open question in many studies to what extent participants are counting “metrically” when they clap or tap their feet. It is also not evident if participants form or employ mental images related to the performance (such as imagined melodies or speech rhythms). London (2004) writes that there are definitely questions that are highly relevant in these studies as for instance if subjects were counting in twos or threes or if they were imagining a melody or rhythmic cadence while clapping or tapping (London 2004: 13).

This brings us back full circle to questions of accentuation with regard to metre. London writes about a certain propensity that we have to impose a sense of accent or groupings on a series of identical tones or clicks. This has long been identified as “subjective rhythmicization” (Bolton 1894; Meuman 1894). London regards this as a misnomer as it is the listener’s sense of differentiation of the stimuli into twos, threes, or fours that is really subjective. Precisely, this means a sense of metre under which the different tones or clicks are heard. Considering his own definition of ‘metre,’ London therefore prefers the term “subject metricization” (London 2004: 14-15).

Robert Kauffmann (1980) addresses the importance of the individual perception of music and rhythm in particular and at the same time also acknowledges the impact of the relation that every society has with time. The aim of his study entitled “African Rhythm: A reassessment” in which he discusses various studies on African rhythm, is to provide a theoretical basis that allows for assessing African rhythm in terms that also make comparisons between African and non-African societies possible. He argues that for an all encompassing view of rhythm, there is a need to also look at “the influences of a culture’s time sense upon all aspects of its musical time” (Kauffmann 1980: 400). He mentions several factors that determine time as for instance the nature of the physical movements accompanying music, such as dance or instrumental technique, the rhythm of a language, or the social structures of a society. He distinguishes two different levels that should be taken into regard when studying rhythm. Studying the “macrorhythm” means to study a culture’s time sense and its formal structure, whereas the study of the “microrhythm” looks at the perceptual present, i.e. what we can actually feel in one specific moment as for instance metric rhythmic configurations or the relationships of

different parts (Kauffmann 1980: 400-401). London also emphasises the importance of people's individual perception of the music. He feels the need to find a way which allows mediating between the abstract and theoretical category of a tempo-metrical type and the timing behaviours that we actually encounter as listeners and performers (London 2004: 159-160). He has therefore developed his "Many Meters Hypothesis" which focuses exactly on the point that each experience of music is different and personal every time. London explains that many studies on rhythmic perception and performance distinguish musicians (usually instrumentalists) from "unskilled or naïve subjects."<sup>20</sup> The differences, however, are not as great as one might initially expect. For this, he basically sees two explanations. Firstly, experimental tasks such as tapping to a metronome or judging the duration of an empty interval are very unlike real-world musical behaviours. And secondly, most people are highly experienced listeners as music has an almost ubiquitous presence in our lives. He admits that

"[...] some of us may have a special interest in one or more particular musical styles, and thus have a sensitivity to the rhythmic nuances of that style, whether it is the cadences of different hip-hop poets, the differing senses of swing among jazz drummers, or the phrasing habits of particular classical pianists. Such nuances are almost always produced and judged in a metrical context" (London 2004: 144).

Generally, however, our metrical skills concerning musical contexts are related to other skilled rhythmical behaviours, such as speech production and comprehension, the listening to and visual tracking of moving objects, as well as motor control behaviours such as walking, running, dancing or doing sports. These behaviours are practiced from earliest childhood and the more familiar we get with a particular rhythm, the more skilled our attentional behaviours tend to become (London 2004: 144). A musical experience is always an experience of a particular piece or a particular performance as we do not, for example, encounter a "generic 4/4" but rather a pattern of timing and dynamics that is particular to a piece, a musical style or a particular performer. His "Many Meters Hypothesis (MMH)" suggests:

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<sup>20</sup> Like London, other authors have very sharply criticised this assumption; see for instance Blacking (1973).

“A listener’s metric competence resides in her or his knowledge of a very large number of context-specific metrical timing patterns. The number and degree of individuation among these patterns increases with age, training, and degree of musical enculturation” (London 2004: 153).

Yet another approach is that of the linguist Theo van Leeuwen (1999). In his book “Speech, Music, Sound” published in 1999 he aims to explore the common grounds of these three fields by *integrating* them; something, which he says, “many contemporary musicians, poets, filmmakers, multimedia designers and so on already do in practice (and what children have always done) [...]” (Van Leeuwen 1999: 4). Many authors point out the relation of language and music, and also specifically regarding rhythm. Hertzfeld (1974), for instance, regards language as the origin of all rhythm:

“The model for musical rhythm is the lilt of language with its ups and downs, its contrasts of stress and absence of stress. [...] Rhythm is also not an independent feature. It cannot be considered separately, but is rather a temporal ordering to which the notes are submitted” (Hertzfeld 1974: 445), cited in Arom 1991: 293).

Van Leeuwen also highlights the rhythmical aspect. One of his main accounts is that sound is either measured or unmeasured and insists that there is no in-between. If measured, it then needs to be distinguished in metronomic and non-metronomic time. In the first instance sound is governed by an implacable regularity given for instance by a metronome, in the second, sound, though measured, subverts regularity and stretches, anticipates or delays as in for instance human speech or movements (Van Leeuwen 1999: 7). He summarises in four points what characterises ‘measure’ for him:

- 1.) measured time divides stream of sound into “measures” of equal duration; “tempo” results from the duration of these measures
- 2.) each measure begins with a “pulse”, a sound which is stressed, made more prominent (by loudness, pitch, duration or combinations of these); pulses mark the sounds that carry the greatest information value in the given context
- 3.) measures are grouped together in “phrases” of up to 7 measures; they are marked off from each other by “boundaries”: breaks or changes in the regular rhythm of the pulses
- 4.) each phrase has a key pulse, the “main pulse” which is the culmination of the “message” of the phrase (Van Leeuwen (1999): 42)

This is a very different understanding of ‘pulse’ than Arom’s idea that ‘pulsation’ should replace the notion of ‘measure’ to describe a sequence of reference points (whether audible or silenced) to which rhythmic flow is organised (see above).

Van Leeuwen sees a direct link between the way in which a society handles musical time and the society's handling of social activities in general; the society's "order of time" (Van Leeuwen 1999: 39). In his view, time is not to be regarded as a phenomenon of nature, but as a human activity and therefore one should rather speak of *timing*. In order to exemplify this, he speaks of the change that the clock, pioneered in Benedictine monasteries, has brought to society; quoting Lewis Mumford: "Benedictine rule gave human enterprise the regular collective beat and rhythm of the machine; for the clock is not merely a means of keeping track of the hours, but of synchronizing the actions of men" (Mumford 1934: 13, cited in Van Leeuwen 1999: 37). With the Industrial revolution the clock became a major tool for control of labour and later also of other human activities. This was also the reason why punctuality became a key virtue among members of the bourgeois society. This goes in hand with what happened in the music during this period. At this point music began to be measured and the system of bar lines was introduced (Van Leeuwen 1999: 37). Van Leeuwen deduces some remarks about Western music from this knowledge. First of all, he recognises two characteristics of Western music, namely that the tempo remains constant and that the number of measures per phrase is regularised to four measures per phrase (or some multiple of it). There is always a common metre or 'beat,' even when the number of notes per measure varies. This beat is followed by all instruments and/or voices, even if it is only felt or tapped with the feet rather than actually played (Van Leeuwen 1999: 47-48). He calls the Western approach to music a 'divisive approach' as people often experience a contradiction between the objective (clock) time and the subjective ("felt") time. Although there is this tension between 'objective' and 'subjective' time, the dominant form of musical time is one in which everyone synchronises to the same beat (Van Leeuwen 1999: 55). Van Leeuwen speaks of "monorhythmic music" (as opposed to "polyrhythmic music") in which there is always a main beat. He recognises, however, that there is a possibility for notes in the melody to anticipate or delay the beat in order to create a tension between the "objective" and "subjective" time (Van Leeuwen 1999: 58). According to Van Leeuwen two kind of "counting" or "time signatures" have dominated in "high" Western music, namely "duple time" and "triple time," both implying an



accentual ranking: the first one being *ONE two ONE two* or *ONE two THREE four ONE two THREE four*; the latter being *ONE two three ONE two three*.

He argues that “most of the things we do (walking, running, shivering and so on) have a binary rhythm” (Van Leeuwen 1999: 47); hence triple time is the more “artificial” metre. As an explanation for this, Van Leeuwen looks into dance and says that duple time has always been associated with collective dances, for example procession dances. During the Baroque period collective dances went into decline and collectivity became a matter of public parades and military marches, more devoted to express national ideas than actual community values. Triple time, in contrast, had been associated with “closed couple dance” (Van Leeuwen 1999: 48).

“So there was on the one hand the procession dance, with its forwards movements, symbolizing progress, exploration, expansion, and nationalistic values, and on the other hand the closed couple dance, expressing the ethos of individualization, self-expression and privacy” (Van Leeuwen 1999: 49).

Van Leeuwen then goes one step further and uses these explanations to draw some conclusions about non-Western music. He joins the many authors (as shown above) who point out the significant meaning and peculiarity of rhythm in African music. Whereas he calls the Western approach to music a “divisive” one, he focuses on the “polyrhythmic music” in African societies. He explains that ‘polyrhythm’ means that each member of the group follows his or her own “internal clock,” which musicians from various African cultures have referred to as “weaving in and out” (Van Leeuwen 1999: 55). Societies in which this approach to rhythm is common have been called “polychronic” societies (Hall 1983); societies, “where the regime of the clock has never gained as much of a foothold as it has, for instance, in Europe or North America” (Van Leeuwen 1999: 55). John Miller Chernoff (1979) in his book on “African Rhythm and African Sensibility,” argues that polyrhythmic music celebrates individuality and difference, and that pluralism is respected “as a source of vitality” (Chernoff 1979: 158). Taking up Chernoff’s idea and referring to his own thoughts about the relation of rhythm and the structure of society, Van Leeuwen explains how individuality and an individual identity is rather supported by polyrhythmic as it

“[...] suggest[s] a relationship between the individual and the group in which one’s own unique identity, one’s individuality, cannot be seen as threatened by

the need to conform to a group. On the contrary, a distinct and unique individuality cannot exist without the group” (Van Leeuwen 1999: 56).

I will discuss questions of identity in relation to ‘rhythm’ throughout section 3.

### Malagasy rhythm(s)

Compared to the music of other African countries, Malagasy music has not been intensively researched. As I have already shown in the literature review, so far there has not been any work on Malagasy music specifically dedicated to the topic of rhythm. In a few works, however, some authors touch upon aspects of rhythm in Malagasy music. As I have also already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the term and concept of ‘6/8 rhythm’ constantly appears within the musicians’ discourses on their music. It also appears in some of the works on Malagasy music or sometimes authors mention a typical structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries.

The Malagasy musicologist Rakotomalala (2003), for example, in her book “Madagascar: La musique dans l’histoire,” analyses the phenomenon that many researchers have made an effort to find a way of transcription that would work for Malagasy music, especially for its “famous complex rhythm” (“rythme réputé complexe”). Rakotomalala describes this rhythmic structure as a combination of binaries and ternaries, though she emphasises that it is more adequate to say that the rhythm was *thought* in binaries and ternaries. She therefore claims the existence of a “mental structure” (“structure mentale”) with regard to rhythm. Musicians, however, tend to improvise a lot, which hardly helps to identify the “initial rhythmical principle.” The issue of overlapping binaries and ternaries and what musicians feel, think, or hear while musicking is a topic that I will come back to in section 3 as it has become of great importance in my analyses, especially of my own musical practices.

This rhythmic structure that Rakotomalala identifies as one of the “most typical Malagasy” elements in the music, also mirrors a common Malagasy expression: *Maromaroitra iraisana* – which she translates as “the disagreements that we share” (“les différends que l’on partage”). This, she concludes, is why the Malagasy rhythm is either in 2, but thought in 3, or it is in 3 and thought in 2. Sometimes these two rhythms are also played simultaneously. A very interesting point she mentions is that everything from

poetry to instrumental music in Madagascar is grounded and based on this rhythm. And she adds that sometimes the “rhythm of speech” (“rythme de la parole”) determines the “musical rhythm” (“rythme musical”) (Rakotomalala 2003: 43-44). The idea that Malagasy language is closely interrelated with the music is an idea that many of the musicians share and that I have also come to understand through my own musical participation as I will discuss in detail in section 3, particularly in chapter 3.3.

The idea of a structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries also shines through in Julien Mallet’s (2008) studies on a particular musical style, namely on *tsapiky* music in South-Western Madagascar. In his article published in 2008 he offers a dense description of a *tsapiky* live performance and explains that there is a particular moment in the music, where one guitarist leads the other players into a certain part of the musical piece which is called *kilatsake*. In order to announce this changeover, he either makes a very fast plucking movement with his right index finger or plays a ternary rhythm ‘against’ the consistent binary rhythm that the other musicians of the group play (Mallet 2008: 169).

The most detailed descriptions and explanations of rhythmical aspects in Malagasy music can be found in Randrianary’s book “Madagascar. Les chants d’une île” (Randrianary 2001). The Malagasy ethnomusicologist invites the reader to a musical journey throughout the island, stressing that, although being an academic himself, he is not particularly aiming at an academic audience. In contrast to Rakotomalala’s work, Randrianary devotes different chapters of his book to the musical phenomena of the different regions of the island: the North, the East, the High Plateaux, and the South-West. Hence, the topic of rhythm does not appear as a generic Malagasy phenomenon, but rather appears at different sites within the dense and very detailed descriptions of musical performances and is explained in the particular regional musical context. This is interesting in as far as many of the musicians also often point at regional differences despite the shared rhythmic base as we will see in section 3. Whereas the title of the first chapter on the North even includes the term ‘rhythm’ (“Au rythme des ouvertures: Le Nord”), it is in the chapter on the music of the High Plateaux region that the topic appears most. However, there is one occasion in this first chapter, where Randrianary also emphasises the existence of overlapping binary and ternary rhythms. He writes about the

musical genre of *salegy*<sup>21</sup> that has its origin in a musical genre called *antsa*, which is also still practiced a great deal. Despite one being the roots of the other, there is one big difference between these two styles, namely the timbre created through the percussion. In *antsa* people clap their hands in a particular way, whereas in *salegy* music the percussion is most of the times created with musical instruments (Randrianary 2001: 26).

Randrianary writes that his collaboration with the musicians oftentimes raises the question of whether the rhythm of these styles is in binaries or ternaries:

« Ces expériences concernant le rythme en collaboration avec les artistes posent le problème de leur nature : binaire ou ternaire. Quand on a l'occasion de regarder les gestes musicaux, il devient évident qu'il s'agit du rythme binaire. On voit quelqu'un au moins qui bat en permanence : un ! deux ! un ! deux ! un ! deux ! Cependant, d'autres personnes battent des valeurs divisibles par trois » (Randrianary 2001: 26-27).<sup>22</sup>

When I started to listen to Malagasy music regularly, I also often asked myself and/or had discussions, even arguments, with friends and fellow musicians whether a particular piece was in two or in three. However, engaging in musical practices myself and learning to play the music has actually made me discover other ways of approaching this issue of overlapping binaries and ternaries as I will explain in chapter 3.3.

This idea of binaries and ternaries reoccurs later in the Randrianary's book where he writes about Rakotozafy, a famous player of the Malagasy zither *marovany*,<sup>23</sup> who died more than thirty years ago.<sup>24</sup> He explains that for Rakotozafy, the tierce and likewise the number 3 played a very important role. Someone who transcribed his music, decided to write it in a 3/8 metre. And yet, the persistent ambiguity of binaries and ternaries in this music is so blatant and let him consider other metres, such as 2/8, 6/16, or 7/16. With regard to Rakotozafy, Randrianary even speaks of an "obsession" to put the accent on the

<sup>21</sup> For more information on *salegy* music, see Eyre (2002); Terramorsi and Rajaonarison (2004).

<sup>22</sup> "These experiences of rhythm in collaboration with the artists have raised questions concerning the problem of their nature: binary or ternary. When we have the chance to observe musical gestures, it becomes evident that it is a binary rhythm. We see at least someone who permanently beats; one! two! one! two! one! two! Meanwhile, others beat measures that are divisible by three." (my translation)

<sup>23</sup> Malagasy term for box-shaped *valiha* (a Malagasy type of zither). *Marovanys* are typically built out of wood or metal and exist in the Southern parts of the island, in the region of Tuléar (Randrianary 2001: 156).

<sup>24</sup> The film "Like a God When He Plays" by Paddy Bush (first broadcasted on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1998 by Channel 4) tells the life of this legendary musician.

third beat which therefore can also be seen as his musical leitmotif (Randrianary 2001: 120-121). I will return to Rakotozafy and his playing style in chapter 3.3.

In Randrianary's chapter on the music of the High Plateaux region, the topic of rhythm is put under a sub-section entitled "l'énigme du rythme" ("the mystery of rhythm") and mentions two main statements. Firstly, Randrianary explains that the frequent usage of the 12/8 is one of the typical phenomena of this region. He calls it an "asymmetrical metre" and particularly reflects upon its roots as many scholars have already described this metre as a pan-African phenomenon. And despite the European and Asian influences in the region of the High Plateaux, Randrianary himself also agrees that "(...) il s'avère plus légitime d'admettre que le rythme 12/8 asymétrique provient de l'Afrique continentale plutôt que de l'Asie ou de l'Europe"<sup>25</sup> (Randrianary 2001: 77). The second argument is about the characteristics of rhythm in that region. He argues that the Malagasy term that is mostly used for rhythm in the High Plateaux region was *ngadona* which is also used, for example, when people talk about pounding the rice or about a footstep during a march. Further, a particular rhythm called *manonjanonja*, apparently one of the most frequent rhythms, designates the movements of the coming and going of waves (Randrianary 2001: 74-75). Again, this mirrors aspects that come up in the musicians' discourses as many also argue that rhythm is closely related, if not inherent in Malagasy everyday life and images of nature also appear as we will see in the analyses in chapter 3.2. Randrianary also uses Western notation to transcribe some of the typical rhythms of the High Plateaux region, but without putting these into bar lines and into a particular metre (Randrianary 2001: 75). Generally, he also often uses the term 'polyrhythm' (as discussed above). Unfortunately however, he does not particularly explain what he means by this in the Malagasy contexts; whether for instance he would call the structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries a polyrhythmic figure. He uses the term in a rather aesthetic way that leaves out technical description. For example, in the chapter on the South-Western region he writes about a particular instrument called *kiloloky* and how it is used in communal musical events. The term 'polyrhythm' forms part of this dense description:

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<sup>25</sup> "(...) it proofs legitimate to assume that the asymmetrical 12/8 rhythm comes from the African continent rather than from Asia or Europe." (my translation)

« Les voix de femmes entrent en jeu responsorial avec l'ensemble *kiloloky*. Il y a souvent là la plus belle exécution de polyphonie et de polyrythmie. Les cris de joie et les jeux vocaux fusent à tue-tête » (Randrianary 2001: 87).<sup>26</sup>

Apart from the rhythm called *manonjamonja* in the High Plateaux region, Randrianary generally emphasises a strong relation between nature and music in Madagascar. In the chapter on music in the East, he talks about a little island called “Nosy Mangabe” that is very famous for its nature. In the “musical description” of the nature of this place, Randrianary uses a couple of terms, such as ‘polyrhythm’ or ‘polyphony’ that again come from a Western academic discourse. His rather philosophical questions at the end – whether it is the human beings who copy nature or vice versa – further emphasise the notion of the connectedness of music and nature/environment in Madagascar:

« Nosy Mangabe est l'une des plus connues. De véritable polymusiques, polyrythmies, polyphonies dans des timbres différents se succèdent continuellement : cascades, vagues, oiseaux, grenouilles, lémuriens. Ce grand concert de la nature fait de cet endroit inhabité une vraie source. Dans tout l'est, hommes et animaux utilisent les différentes espèces de bambou comme instruments de musique ou espace musical. Les petites grenouilles se mettent au creux de ces plantes pour émettre leurs voix. Les notes défilent formant des lignes mélodiques et des rythmes complexes selon le procédé dit du ‘hoquet’. (...) Est-ce que l'homme imite – inconsciemment peut-être – la nature ou est-ce la nature qui imite son maître, l'homme ? Perpétuelle question » (Randrianary 2001: 57).<sup>27</sup>

Randrianary towards the end of his book returns to the topic of rhythm with the statement that rhythm is the identity card of the African continent (“la carte d'identité d'Afrique continentale”). Even if Madagascar is definitely part of it, he writes, it still has its particularity with regard to rhythm and vocal techniques:

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<sup>26</sup> The women's voices enter into a responsorial play with the *kiloloky* ensemble. That is where the most beautiful execution of polyphony and polyrhythm is. The crows and the vocal games burst out loud with this singing.” (my translation)

<sup>27</sup> “Nosy Mangabe is one of the best known. Real polymusic and polyrhythm in different timbres continually succeed each other: cascades, waves, birds, frogs, lemurs. This big concert of nature turns this uninhabited place into a real source. Everywhere in the East, human beings and animals use the different sorts of bamboo as musical instruments or musical space. Little frogs sit in the hollow of these plants to emit their voice. The notes pass by, forming melody lines and complex rhythms like a ‘hiccup’. (...) Is it mankind who – maybe unconsciously – imitates nature or is it nature that imitates its Master, mankind? Perpetual question.” (my translation)

« Le rythme est considéré comme la carte d'identité de l'Afrique continentale ; sans renoncer à cette appartenance, la Grande Ile est quant à elle un sanctuaire des techniques vocales » (Randrianary 2001: 114).<sup>28</sup>

These techniques are for example musical styles, such as *antsa*, *rija*, or *jijy*; partly being forms of semi-singing/semi-speaking (Randrianary 2001: 114). The particular position that the voice and singing holds in Madagascar is often mentioned by Randrianary; hence already his book is entitled “Les chants d’une île” (“The songs of an island”).

Before returning to some of the aspects that have come up in the discussion on rhythmical aspects in Malagasy music and that mirror ideas and theories of the musicians themselves, the next chapter will present a detailed expose of my theoretical and methodological framework. This will then lead to a more personal and self-reflexive account of my own research and work with Malagasy musicians.

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<sup>28</sup> “Rhythm is considered the identity card of the African continent; without denying its belonging, the Big Island is a sanctuary for vocal techniques.” (my translation)

## Chapter 2.2 – Methodological reflections: integrating musical experiences into ethnomusicological research

- Introduction
- Key terms:
  - Experiences
  - Self-Other dichotomy
- Theorising Fieldwork
  - Historical reflections
  - The idea of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ within fieldwork
  - Experiences: ‘narrativisation of experiences’ and “musical being-in-the-world” (Titon 1997)
  - ‘New fieldwork’ in ethnomusicology
- Importance of integrating both, analyses of discourses and of musical practices
- “Towards a (more) performative ethnomusicology” (Baily 2008)
- Why there is a need to participate musically
- Understanding musically
- “*Presumption of Sameness*” (Agawu 2003) and “Subject-Centred Ethnography” (Rice 2003)

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I have introduced the existing anthropological and musicological literature on Madagascar. I have further pointed at the seemingly contradictory issue of the presence of the term ‘6/8 rhythm’ in the musicians’ discourses and their emphasis on the Malagasy concept of *lova-tsofina* at the same time. In order to start tackling this issue (which I will do in more detail in section 3) I have discussed theories on ‘rhythm,’ starting from a very general perspective on the meaning and understandings of the concept, particularly pointing at the terminological confusion and its wide-ranging relations to other cultural topoi. I have further analysed theories on the discourse on



rhythm in African music and finally presented a specific discussion on Malagasy rhythm(s).

Whereas in the next chapter I will present a more personal and self-reflexive consideration of the development of my research and reflect upon experiences I made and situations I encountered during my own fieldwork, in this chapter I will give a detailed expose of my methodological approach and the theories it is based on.

Two key terms appear as a thread throughout this chapter (and they will reappear in section 3): the notion of ‘experience’ and the dichotomy of ‘Self’ and ‘Other.’

I will analyse the meanings of and ideas behind these concepts before theorising what has been my main methodological tool: ethnographic fieldwork. Here, I will look at its historical development and how the focus on reflexivity and relationships in the field since the late 70s/early 80s has led anthropologists and ethnomusicologists to emphasise and analyse ‘experiences.’ I will look at theories on the ‘narrativisation’ of experiences and how this relates to another dimension that the discipline of ethnomusicology adds: the experience of “musical being-in-the-world” (Titon 1997). Theories on the so-called “new fieldwork” (Hellier-Tinoco 2003) in ethnomusicology thematise the interplay of these two ways of understanding and representing experiences. I will argue that discourses and musical practices are best to be understood and analysed as being in a constant interrelation as they are interdependent and constantly inform each other. The performance approach has been discussed and applied within ethnomusicology for several decades; however not as much as some scholars argue for (for example Baily 2008). I agree and will therefore discuss why there is a need to integrate musical practices into ethnomusicological research and what it means to me to understand through musicking. Finally, I will present the theoretical and methodological framework that my arguments are based on and that support this approach of integrating both, the analysis of discourses and musical practices: ethnomusicologist Rice’s “subject-centred ethnography” (Rice 2003) and Agawu’s demand for a “*presumption of sameness*” (Agawu 2003).

### Key terms

Before explaining my methodological approach and the theories it is based on, I would like to point at two terms that are essential to my methodological and theoretical framework, and that will furthermore also reappear as major topics in section 3, namely those of ‘experiences’ and the dichotomy of ‘Self’ and ‘Other.’ The latter is inseparable from questions of identity, self-understanding and belonging. In our world “marked by socio-political upheavals and transnational mobilities” (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005: 1) these questions have become of crucial importance and subject to constant negotiation for everyone in their everyday lives. In this spirit Simon Frith (1996) argues that “identity is *mobile*, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being” (Frith 1996: 109). Many researchers have shown that music is a powerful tool in the construction of identities (e.g. Waterman 1990, Stokes 1994, Frith 1996, Connell and Gibson 2003, Biddle and Knights 2007). Different elements, such as melody, harmony, stylistic variations, instrumentations or lyrics can play a role. ‘Rhythm’ has also been recognised as an important source for people to reflect upon questions of belonging and their perception of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ (e.g. Monson 1999, Neustadt 2002). Frith argues that identity should be seen as an “experiential process which is most vividly grasped *as music*,” arguing that music seems to be the key to identity as “it offers, so intensely, a sense of both, self and others, of the subjective in the collective” (Frith 1996: 110). However, the emphasis on experiences of identity has not only been underlined within musical research. Sociolinguists argue that narratives are essential for people to make sense of their experiences in life. It is through narratives that we negotiate questions of who we are and who we are not, where we feel we belong to or do not belong to (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005; Thornborrow and Coates 2005). I therefore also agree with ethnomusicologist Rice (2003) that we should think about experiences not as an inner phenomenon, but that experiences are inseparable from the interaction with the outside world and other people (Rice 2003: 157, 160). I will analyse in further depth the meanings of and ideas behind ‘experiences’ and the dichotomy of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ when I look at the relation of identity, narratives and experiences of shared music making later on. As we will see in the following section, both terms have been of crucial importance in scholarly discussions to theorise what has also been my main methodological tool, namely that of ethnographic fieldwork.

## Theorising fieldwork

### Historical Reflections

In order to understand recent scholarly debates and theories on fieldwork, it is necessary to take a historical look at it first. In the first decades of the twentieth century anthropological paradigms underwent immense changes. With the emerging new schools of British social anthropology, mainly represented by Bronislaw Malinowski in England, and American cultural anthropology, mainly represented by Franz Boas, new conditions were set that can be seen as reactions to evolutionary anthropology of the nineteenth century. One of the most important changes that appeared as a reaction towards the persistent Eurocentric point of reference (Stocking 2001: 42-42) which characterised anthropological works before, was the demand for intensive long-term fieldwork<sup>29</sup> (Cooley 2003: 5). Cooley argues that before Boas and Malinowski's "radical proposal" of long-term fieldwork for scientific research purposes, fieldwork presupposed the influence of the people studied as it was mainly undertaken within the frequent interrelated contexts of missionary work, colonial administrations and national movements (Fabian 1991: 132, 135). Although Cooley admits that this might be a broad generalisation and that there are many examples of fieldworkers that did not aim to colonise, nationalise or convert their informants, literature on the history of anthropology very much criticises early anthropology for being closely intertwined with colonialism and missionary work (Cooley 2003: 5). These reflections on anthropological history are very important to bear in mind as Kisliuk (1997) reminds us that that we encounter these legacies in the ethnographic past (Kisliuk 1997: 27).

Despite the anthropologists and ethnomusicologists' intentional examination of this "ethnographic past" and the effects that earlier anthropological works have had, hardly anyone denies that fieldwork always has and will have an impact on the people we work with. This also becomes evident in book titles such as "Time and the other: how anthropology makes its object" (Fabian 1983), "When they read what we write" (Brettell 1993), or "Shadows in the field" (Barz and Cooley 1997) to name but a few. Hellier-Tinoco (2003) speaks of a crisis in representation that in the late 1970s and 1980s brought a surge of attention towards reflexivity, for which we find for instance evidence

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<sup>29</sup> See for example: Malinowski (1962) [1922]; and Boas (1936).

in the works of Marcus and Fischer (1986), or Clifford and Marcus (1986). Ethnographic writing became more reflexive in the way that both, those researched as well as the researcher were included in the picture.<sup>30</sup> Self-reflexivity among the researchers also directed the attention towards relationships. Hellier-Tinoco (2003) sees a reason for the emphasis on relationships in the unexpected experiences that many researchers have made during their fieldwork:

“(…) they have been taken by surprise in terms of their field relations, to the extent of being unwittingly and unexpectedly pulled into the politics of their fieldwork context” (Hellier-Tinoco 2003: 24).

However, despite that most researchers are conscious about the impact of fieldwork; many scholars still see problems, especially concerning the gap between theory and practice. Cooley (2003) for instance criticises that not enough attention is given to the nature of the impact and Hellier-Tinoco (2003) argues that “although there is a move towards examining fieldwork relations, thorough debate and planning are still not in evidence” (Hellier-Tinoco 2003: 24). She criticises that researchers do not reflect enough upon the dimensions of relationships in the field:

“I will suggest that there still remains a deep-rooted imbalance, and even a self-centred or selfish stance, in which the complexities, impact, ramifications and outcome of each relationship that we, as researchers, enter into in the field are not considered as a fundamental part of our planning and being in the field” (Hellier-Tinoco 2003: 20).

These critiques are grounded on more general reflections concerning the very nature of fieldwork and how it defines the role of the fieldworker. Cooley (2003) in an article on theorising fieldwork impact coined the term “peasant-love”-fieldwork for Malinowski’s fieldwork method. This term has its roots in Central European Slavic history. According to Ernest Gellner, Central European Slavic ethnographers had been influenced by a kind of nationalism and populism that encouraged them to explore “a peasant culture in the hope of preserving and protecting it, above all from encroachment by rival nationalisms” (Gellner 1998: 115). These ethnographers were motivated by love and even if Cooley

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<sup>30</sup> Recent research shows that ethnographers more often also focus primarily on their own person and hence become their own main research object. Prominent works in the so-called field of ‘auto-ethnography’ are for example Reed-Danahay (1997, 2001), Ellis (2004), Chang (2008), or Khosravi (2010).

(2003) argues that this “peasant-love” should not be taken literally in the case of Malinowski, it still serves as a metaphor for fieldwork ideology at the time:

“I intend the term ‘peasant-love’ not to be taken literally (Malinowski’s writings on the Trobrianders, for example, do not suggest profound love) but to stand as a colourful marker for an emerging ideology with significant roots in Slavic ethnography. It is a metaphor for ideologies – and perhaps Slavic sensibilities, as Malinowski and others have suggested – that influenced ethnographic methods in the emerging school of anthropology. The emphasis on the present rather than history was key to peasant-love ideology and had a profound impact on Malinowski’s functionalism, which focused on the *ethnographic* present” (Cooley 2003: 8).

Cooley further argues that even if we do not take peasant-love literally, we still hope and even expect as a researcher to find and make friends in the field. This suggests a new model, the “friendship model,” also mentioned by Titon (1997) and Hellier-Tinoco (2003). Cooley describes friendship as the “most benign form of interpersonal relationship” and explains that it still also takes the risk of not completely formed or realised motivations and ideologies. He suggests that what could be seen as a latent nationalism that inspired Malinowski’s peasant-love fieldwork is nowadays replaced by an emerging “globalism” that we find within the fieldwork model of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (Cooley 2003: 10).

Cooley generally presumes that fieldwork is always about the politics of power and about access to experience and information. Bearing this in mind, he sees a couple of reasons why one should take a deliberate step back from friendship as a model for fieldwork:

“My fear is that the promise of cross-cultural understanding founded on friendship (no doubt conceived here from an Anglo-American perspective) may be motivated by not fully articulated post-national ideologies of globalism. Driven by the material economic of globalization, globalism is the ideology that allows us to believe that globalization is a project worth pursuing. It may be that a global aesthetic has already emerged in music, (...) but I am not convinced that this is necessarily a good thing. Is friendship a liberal humanist means for global re-colonization – for re-appropriating the other? Is friendship a gesture from those with power and wealth to those without in a new colonization of the other in order to mine ethnographic data? (...) I am convinced that whatever role cross-cultural ethnography may have in wittingly or unwittingly promoting globalism and globalization, we need to carefully consider our motivations and our impact on the world that we study” (Cooley 2003: 12).

Armbruster (2008) also raises the issues of friendship and power within fieldwork. She writes about the uneasiness that we often feel, wanting to be friends with the people whom we want to study at the same time. Asking the question as to how our ‘friendship’ relationships in the field relate to our making of our own academic identities (Armbruster 2008: 136), she argues that much “ethnographic tension” is created when we try “(...) to reconcile our politically and our academically biased selves. While the former is about the alignment with the powerless, the latter still is, in many ways, about the alignment with the powerful” (Armbruster 2008: 138).

Hellier-Tinoco stresses that friendship and human relationships in fieldwork form a central theme in scholarly discussions. The main point, she argues is that relationships, whether classified as ‘friendship’ or not should be seen as an interactive encounter and therefore depend on forms of reciprocity (Hellier-Tinoco 2003: 25). An example for this comes from Titon (1997) who writes about an experience during fieldwork where his role as “only being researcher” was questioned in the way that the musicians he worked with also saw some potential in their encounter with him.

“(...) my relationship with them added a dimension: I became someone who might be able to promote them, to help them in their careers, instead of just a young man hanging around older ones and trying to learn music from them. Besides friendship I now had a tacit contract with them” (Titon 1997: 88).<sup>31</sup>

I will come back to this topic in the next chapter as I have had some similar experiences during my fieldwork with Malagasy musicians in Antananarivo.

### The idea of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ within fieldwork

The focus on relationships and the urge to define these relationships in the field has led many researchers to reflect upon the idea of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ within their work and their encounters. Cooley (2003) explains, for example, that the ‘friendship model’ is characterised by a belief in cultural relativity, human equality, and interpersonal relationships and is therefore based on the idea that we all are one and that ethnography may be the tool to help us realise this one-world ideology. We aim to better understand the ‘Self’ by researching the ‘Other,’ for there is no real distinction between ‘Self’ and

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<sup>31</sup> The same problematic is discussed in Kiwan and Meinhof (2011: introduction) who refer to these interconnections as ‘accidental hubs.’

‘Other,’ he writes (Cooley 2003: 10-11). The idea and distinction of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ has been very much theorised in literature on anthropological method and fieldwork in particular. Researchers have asked themselves to what extent they can see themselves as researcher and the researched as potentially interchangeable, and if there was something like “dialogues that typify the fieldwork experience” (Hellier-Tinoco 2003: 27). For Titon (1997) fieldwork requires and even imposes a certain sense of separation in relation to the Self-Other dichotomy. Kisliuk (1997), however, argues that “the deeper our commitment in the field, the more our life stories intersect with our ‘subject’s’, until Self-Other boundaries are blurred” (Kisliuk 1997: 23). Hellier-Tinoco writes that in any case, if the experience in the field is dialogical and interpenetrating between the researcher and the researched, this will affect the relations in many unforeseen ways (Hellier-Tinoco 2003: 27). Titon (1997) proposes to place an emphasis on ‘connectedness,’ meaning to regard ourselves as emergent selves, rather than autonomous selves. We are connected selves who are “enmeshed in reciprocity” (Titon 1997: 99). For Hellier-Tinoco, this connection that Titon describes can be seen as a shift away from the separation between scholarship, the field and life towards regarding the field as an intrinsic part of our lives. This also means that we maintain our relationships in the field with the same responsibility, reciprocity and commitment that we give to relationships in our ‘normal’ life, as “(...) the field may or may not be our home, it is home for those people with whom we form relationships. We are all experiencing people, we are not play-acting: this is for real” (Hellier-Tinoco 2003: 32).

#### Experiences: ‘narrativisation of experiences’ and “musical-being-in-the-world” (Titon 1997)

As already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, scholarly discussions and theories across disciplines have for several decades directed their attention to narratives as the “narrativization of lived experience is one of the most fundamental processes of making sense of our lives (...)” (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005: 101). Narrating our lives is therefore an important source for making sense of our experiences. It is through narratives that we also structure and interpret our experiences (Cheshire and Ziebland 2005: 17). What is often referred to as the “narrative turn” in sciences – not only in the

humanities and social sciences, but also in natural sciences - goes back a long way in history to Nietzsche's observation that "there are no facts but only interpretations" (Nietzsche (1956/1844-1900): 903; cited in Meinhof and Galasinski 2005: 72). Theories have therefore emphasised that there is no such thing as an 'outside fixed reality,' but reality is rather constructed through social interaction and narrativisation of our experiences. Meinhof and Galasinski (2005) argue that it is through narratives that we also order our experiences in a 'tellable' form which is interpretative and evaluative at the same time (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005: 72, 102). Thornborrow and Coates (2005) write about the pervasive role that narratives play in our lives as it is through narratives that we tell ourselves and each other who we are and who we are not. Narratives are therefore central to our social and cultural identity (Thornborrow and Coates 2005: 1, 7). Many scholars agree on the fact that identity is created through narratives which again is related to the enforcement of a sense and perception of 'Self' and 'Other.' Narratives "construct, display and reinforce our sense of self (Schiffrin 1996), and relate this sense of self to others in our social worlds (Bruner 1986)" (Cheshire and Ziebland 2005: 17). The way we speak is implicated in how we position ourselves in the different contexts of our lives. By telling our lives we constantly position ourselves against spaces and people to whom we feel we belong to or do not belong to (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005: 71). This constant identity shift between in-groups and out-groups through narratives will be of importance throughout section 3 in which I analyse the musicians' discourses. The discipline of ethnomusicology adds yet another dimension of experience (or making sense of our experiences) which becomes especially relevant in debates on identity and the dichotomy of 'Self' and 'Other,' namely the possibility of what Titon (1997) calls "musical being-in-the-world." He describes it as an ontology that centres in knowing people through collective music making as shared musical experiences might also lead to shared understanding (Titon 1997: 94). Many ethnomusicologists have argued that their experience of "musical being-in-the-world" has offered them insights and paths towards understanding that other methods, such as linguistic methods, did not achieve. Even more important for some, was that the musical experience allowed them to go beyond the insider-outsider or 'Self' and 'Other' distinction that is often so crucial to much (ethnomusicological) thinking. The ethnomusicologist Rice (1997) who has worked in



Bulgaria for a long time, writes that he has “moved to a place untheorized by the insider-outsider distinction.” Talking to the people had already directed him towards an emic understanding, he writes. When he tried to understand the Bulgarian insider perspectives through words about music, he thought that he could be satisfied with the results. However, he then realised that he “ran into the limits of this language-based method and its associated theory of culture. I encountered precisely the ‘linguocentric predicament’ that Charles Seeger (1977: 47) would have predicted for me” (Rice 1997: 109).

Considering this predicament, Seeger suggests that the aim should be:

“(a) to integrate music knowledge and feeling in music and the speech knowledge and feeling about them to the extent this is possible in speech presentation, and (b) to indicate as clearly as possible the extent to which this is not possible (Seeger 1977: 48).

Rice describes how participating musically and being capable of playing in the musical tradition he studied finally completely transformed him:

“Although the linguistic methods of cognitive anthropology had helped me narrow the gap between emic and etic perspectives, I could not in the end close that gap completely. When, on the other hand, I abandoned those methods and acted musically, it seemed as if I fell right into the gap between insider and outsider, into a theoretical ‘no place’ that felt very exciting, if not exactly a utopia. I was neither insider nor an outsider” (Rice 1997: 110).

Similarly excited, Titon (1997) describes his own musical experience during research and how this influenced his sense of ‘Self’:

“Making music I experience the disappearance of my separate self; I feel as if music fills me and I have become music in the world. But I also experience the return of the knowing self. The experience of music making is, in some circumstances in various cultures throughout the world, an experience of becoming a knowing self in the presence of other becoming, knowing selves. This is a profoundly communal experience, and I am willing to trust it” (Titon 1997: 99).

#### ‘New fieldwork’ in ethnomusicology

These kinds of experiences have influenced and directed ethnomusicological thinking and methods. This becomes evident in more recent attempts to further theorise fieldwork. As already discussed above, the method at the time of Malinowski in the field was rather one of on-site and in-person observation. However, a shift has occurred which now places field relations at the centre of the fieldwork project. Interactive encounters between the

researcher and the researched have become increasingly essential to ethnomusicology. Many ethnomusicologists speak of a “new fieldwork” that reconfigures ‘the field’ as an *experience* rather than a place (Hellier-Tinoco 2003: 25-26). Barz (1997) describes the major paradigm shift in ethnomusicology in such a way, that now the focus lies on “doing” and “knowing” fieldwork, rather than on the representing of fieldwork (Barz 1997: 205). Ethnomusicologists very much emphasise the experience of participatory musical contexts, as we have seen in the examples of Rice and Titon above. The reason for that, as Titon puts it is that “(...) our most satisfying knowledge is often acquired through the experience of music making and the relationships that arise during fieldwork” (Titon 1997: 98). One of the main aims for the researched as well as for the researcher is therefore to ask and find out what it is like to make and to know music as lived experience (Titon 1997: 87). This aim actually implies that the experience of “musical being-in-the-world” should rather be seen in a permanent interplay with the narrativisation of experiences. Even if the shared music making adds another dimension of understanding experiences, the process of telling each other about these experience and even more so the writing of an ethnography later on will always challenge the researcher as well as the researched by demanding to put into words what one has experienced *musically*. Many ethnomusicologists have reflected upon narratives as a path towards the understanding of making and knowing music as lived experiences. Barz (1997), for example, describes ethnography as an integral part of the translation of experience and in this way also as a kind of extension of the “field performance.” He even speaks of “performative writing” as he argues that “[f]or most field researchers the period of ‘translation’ is frustrating, where nothing, including the self, is at it seems, and many are now beginning to realize that field research itself is just a period of translation” (Barz 1997: 208). Titon (1997) explains that it is through narratives that we tell others about our experiences and show how we come to understand:

“Narrative, of course, is the way we habitually tell ourselves and others about our experiences, and so it emerges as a conventional form in phenomenologically weighted representations of people making music. (...) ethnography becomes an experience weighted genre in which narrative includes background information, interpretation and analysis, and above all one in which insights emerge from experience: one shows how one comes to understand” (Titon 1997: 96).

### The importance of integrating both, the analysis of discourses *and* musical practices

As the discussion above has shown, musical practices and discourses about music are often described or experienced almost as two separated worlds and many scholars have expressed their difficulties to describe their musical experiences in words. This is also an issue raised by many of the musicians I have worked with. They also often say that it is very difficult to find the right words to talk about their own musical experiences. Even if I agree and have made similar experiences myself, I think that we tend to give too much attention to this ‘problem’ and thereby forget that it is not a one-way directional phenomenon. I would argue that our narratives do not only show how we come to understand our experiences of musicking, but our musical experiences likewise show how we come to understand of what we have experienced through the discourses that we create or that we listen to. Our discourses are informed by our musical experiences as much as our musical experiences are informed by our discourses. I will come back to and explain my argument in more detail later in this chapter and in section 3 will show how I therefore analysed discourses and experiences of musical practices interdependently and in a constant interrelation.

First, I will give a brief overview of how up till now the performance approach has been discussed and applied within the discipline of ethnomusicology. I will particularly look at other researcher’s personal experiences and how they have made use of these experiences for their academic purposes.

### “Towards a (more) performative ethnomusicology (Baily 2008)”

According to John Baily (2001), learning up to perform has had “quite a long history in ethnomusicology” (Baily 2001: 86). However, in 2008 he still claims that only very few ethnomusicological works have actually applied a performative approach. The reason for this seems to be a problem of academic “outcome,” referring to the regulations and curricula of academic work in general. He argues that, in addition to scholarly writings, multimedia or documented recordings, we would need live performances as well. Recent debates within the discipline support Baily’s argument that there is a need within ethnomusicology to move towards “a (more) performative approach” (Baily 2008: 131).

In order to understand how this can be achieved, but also what kind of difficulties the performance approach inherits, it is useful to look at experiences that have already been made within ethnomusicological research and how these experiences were used for academic discussions and analyses.<sup>32</sup>

#### Why there is a need to participate musically

Mantle Hood is regarded as the ethnomusicologist who institutionalised the performance approach by introducing the term “bi-musicality” in 1960 (Hood 1960). Some researchers have definitely had the intention to learn to play certain musics during field research prior to the 1960s, but were often prevented by reasons, such as colonial situations. Jaap Kunst’s experience in Bali with gamelan music in the 1920s and 1930s is a good example for this problematic (Baily 2008:118).<sup>33</sup> Hood’s (1960) argument that ethnomusicologists should have the ability of being “bi-musical” is based on his general idea that training in basic musicianship is fundamental to any kind of musical scholarship. The term “bi-musicality” suggests that someone is equally at ease and has the knowledge and the ability to participate in two different music cultures (Hood 1960: 55). Although the term and concept is widely used and appreciated within ethnomusicology, some scholars also see problems with it or at least see the need to redefine it. Baily (2008) argues that the prefix “bi” implies an emphasis on *two* music cultures only, in the same way as someone is called bilingual when they have fluency in two languages. He suggests that there might well be people who are involved in more than two music cultures or musicians *combining* different musics (Baily 2001: 86). Instead, he proposes the term “intermusability,” fusing the words ‘musical’ and ‘ability’ and thus emphasising the possibility of having the knowledge of and the ability to play different musics (Baily 2008: 118).

Many scholars have emphasised that the performance approach brings another layer to anthropological fieldwork and that it offers advantages on many different levels.

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<sup>32</sup> There is a considerable amount of literature on the ethnography of ‘performance’, with research in this field also relating to musical performance. ‘Performance studies’ are often intertwined or integrated with other academic disciplines, such as ethnomusicology and anthropology. However, it has also become an independent discipline and is taught as such at many universities. Prominent scholars are, for example, Conquergood (1985), Turner (1986), and more recently Denzin (2003) and Schechner (2006).

<sup>33</sup> Jaap Kunst was a colonial officer in Dutch East Indies during the 1920s and 1930s and was not able to participate in gamelan performances. For further information, please see: Heims, Ernst (1976): *Letter to Ethnomusicology regarding Judith Becker’s review of Music in Java*. In: *Ethnomusicology*, XX(1): 97-101.

I already gave a short insight into this discussion above. Baily (2008) gives a few examples, or “points of considerations” as he calls it, for advantages of the performance approach. In his opinion, participation in musical events leads to improved opportunities for observation whilst at the same time giving you direct entry into the performance event (Baily 2008: 126). He writes that:

“[b]eing able to perform to a reasonable standard provides privileged access to the *actualité* (...). It was not so much that I understood the music as a performer but that being able to play it gave me an immediate and large area of common experience with people to whom I was a complete stranger. We were all heirs to a common musical tradition. Again, it was a matter of musical relationships forming the basis for social relationships” (Baily 2001: 96).

I will come back to the idea of a “common experience” later in this chapter.

The French ethnomusicologist Julien Mallet who has been working on *tsapiky* music in the South-Western region of Tuléar in Madagascar is also a performing guitarist. In his recently published book (Mallet 2009) he mentions advantages of being a musician, such as building relationships that go beyond the idea of researcher – researched (Mallet 2009: 28). He also reflects upon what he calls “juggling” between his status as a student and that of a guitarist, arguing that this has given him the possibility to gain a certain balance between “inwardness” and “outwardness.” In contrast to my own experiences in Madagascar, Mallet mentions that being a musician has created some mistrust among the *tsapiky* musicians as the “stealing of songs” is an important topic within the *tsapiky* music scene:

« Jongler entre mon statut d’étudiant et celui de guitariste m’a permis de garder un certain équilibre entre intériorité et extériorité. Me limiter à l’un m’a souvent semblé trop distant, me borner à l’autre ou trop l’accentuer comportait le risque d’une méfiance de la part des musiciens, d’autant plus justifiable que le vol de chanson est un leitmotiv dans l’univers du *tsapiky* » (Mallet 2009 : 29).<sup>34</sup>

The topic of ‘stealing songs’ also appears in Kiwan and Meinhof (2011). They describe how Malagasy musicians are aware of both, the opportunities, but also the threats of translocal and transnational connections. Musicians in rural areas express their fear that

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<sup>34</sup> “Juggling between my double status as a student and a guitar player allowed me to keep a balance between inwardness and outwardness. To restrict myself to [the first] one has often seemed too distant, but to focus merely on the other one carried the risk of creating mistrust among the musicians, all the more as stealing songs is a leitmotiv in the world of *tsapiky*.” (my translation)

songs are unwittingly or also purposefully taken, for example by visiting musicians and later on marked as 'traditional,' ignoring the author's ownership (Kiwani and Meinhof 2011: chapter 1).

Although Mallet does these reflections at the beginning of the book and although his research included shared musical experiences with the musicians during his long stay in Madagascar, he does not come back to this topic or describe any of these experiences in more detail later in the book. However, his musical education and knowledge can be found in detailed transcriptions - in Western notation - of the music that he studied and learned.<sup>35</sup> My observation here mirrors Bohlman's remark that the discipline of ethnomusicology often demonstrates a primary interest in the music object. He argues that ethnomusicologists insist on "presenting and commodifying music in Western notation, recordings, or world-music courses that fulfill the same curricular requirements as Western music courses (Bohlman 1993: 418-419).

Baily (2001) further suggests that performing the music you are researching allows you to understand the music from the "inside." He writes that when playing, you implicitly have to have some knowledge about what you are doing:

“(...) the structure of the music comes to be apprehended operationally, in terms of what you do, and, by implication, of what you have to know” (Baily 2001: 94).

Another argument he gives is that learning to perform also provides you with insights into methods of learning and the work of institutions for musical training (Baily 2001: 94). Mirroring Mallet's experience, Baily writes that for many researchers, learning to perform can also give you an understandable role in the community that you are working in and it might help you for orientation, especially in the beginning (Baily 2001: 95). He also reflects upon the post-fieldwork period and writes that once you have started to learn to perform, you are very likely to continue to do so after the field research as “you tend to take on the music as your own” (Baily 2001:96). This continuity can then lead to situations in which the researcher suddenly becomes the 'researched.' It is possible that the researcher becomes a certain 'source' or 'archive,' such as for field recordings, but also through his or her own musical experiences (Baily 2001: 96). This has also already

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<sup>35</sup> See transcriptions in Mallet (2009).

happened to me as I will explain with examples in the next chapter where I reflect upon my own field research.

### Understanding musically

The previous discussion has shown many reasons why there is a need to integrate performance into ethnomusicological research. But what actually happens in practice? How can we explain what it means for us as researchers to understand musically or through musicking? In other words, how can we finally integrate what we have understood into our academic “outcome”? Here, it is important and necessary to reflect upon the interrelation of performance and analysis and how one informs the other. Musicologist Nicholas Cook (1999) has coined the phrase of “analysing performance and performing analysis” which is also the title of his chapter in the book “Rethinking music” (Cook 1999). He argues that performance and analysis should be regarded as being in a reciprocal process. A theory that does justice to performance should at the same time be a theory aware of its own performance qualities (Cook 1999: 242). Cook criticises that many scholars, such as for example Wallace Berry (1989) who is known for having marked the emergence of ‘analysis and performance’ as a recognised sub-discipline within music theory, always emphasise how analysis leads to performance, but never the other way around (Cook 1999: 239-240). This critique goes in hand with his argument that musicology does not just reflect practice, but actually helps to mould it (Cook 1999: 243). Cook further speaks of a “performative epistemology” of music theory that has been evolving and has become a consensus:

“(...) the idea, to put it in a nutshell, that one should make analysis true *through*, rather than true *to*, experience” (Cook 1999: 252).

Ethnomusicologist Rice (1994) in his book about his musical experience in Bulgaria does not directly speak of analysis versus performance. However, his understanding of ‘musical experience’ as well as his description of his method implies that his approach is one that actually regards both as reciprocal. Rice speaks of a new “world of music” that ethnomusicologists encounter during their research. He argues that researchers do not seek so much to understand the inner experience of people from another culture. It is neither the ‘Self’ nor the ‘Other,’ as he writes, that becomes the object of understanding.

The researcher's interpretation seeks to expose a world that is referenced by certain symbols and symbolic behaviour. This world is at the same time a very complex one of multiple meanings opened up by these symbols and available for interpretation by everyone who can experience them (Rice 1994: 7). It is therefore rather about learning and understanding this world suggested by music sounds, performance, and contexts (Rice 1994: 5).

Rice defines musical experience as "the history of the individual's encounter with the world of musical symbols in which he finds himself" (Rice 1994: 6). This history of encounter, he further explains, consists of a dialectical movement between distancing that invites explanation and appropriation that then suggests a new understanding (Rice 1994: 6). What he exactly means by this dialectical movement becomes clear in the example he gives of his very first and therefore initial experience with Bulgarian music. This experience was his participation in Bulgarian folk dances. At some point, however, he retired from dancing and by watching and listening to what was going on, figured out and explained to himself the underlying rhythmical metres, such as for example 7/8 or 11/8. He writes:

"In semiotic terms, I was beginning to understand the code used to construct musical messages in Bulgarian style, to form a structural syntactical explanation that, for all of its lack of reference to worlds beyond the music, influenced my experience of it. In hermeneutic terms, the world referenced by these music and dance symbols expanded from the narrow one of folk dancing to one that included my previous musical experiences. My expanded understanding of both the structural sense and potential reference of the music and dance altered and reconstituted my experience of them. As a result of this process of distancing and appropriation, I was moved for the first time to wonder about the world that produced and exported these symbols to us" (Rice 1994: 7).

Rice calls this example the "first hermeneutical arc" in his experiences, arguing that this process of experiencing Bulgarian music "from understanding to explanation to understanding, and from appropriation to distancing to reappropriation" can be seen as representative for many similar moves that he has made during his research (Rice 1994: 7). I will come back to the discussion of how one's own previous musical experience inform and interrelate with new musical experience in the next chapter when I talk about my own learning of Malagasy music.



Baily (2008) also reflects upon his previous musical experience when he gives a few practical examples of how his own research has informed his performances of Afghan music (playing the two instruments *rubāb* and *dutār*). He has used video and film to analyse right hand performance techniques that helped him to develop a “formation of a motor grammar” which he can use in improvised rhythmic performance. The research has also allowed him to collect traditional repertoire in notated form. Analysing this repertoire has then helped him to compose new musical pieces in traditional style. Further, he can use his written notation to remember the repertoire. Being a researcher also allows him to have access to many recordings, not only of Afghan music, but also to neighbouring countries’ musics with similar styles. Finally, the knowledge and musical experiences of other musics as well as knowing and discussing the music with musicians coming from different musical backgrounds has helped him, for example, to explain perceived stylistic differences or gain a certain freedom in playing melodic improvisation (Baily 2008: 129-130).

Some of these examples mirror my own experiences that I will analyse in the next chapter, but especially in section 3. Here, I would like to briefly come back to my argument that discourses about music and musical experiences should be analysed in a constant interrelation. This issue is often mentioned by ethnomusicologists, but rather indirectly, such as in the last example mentioned by Baily above. Personally, I think that it makes sense to think about how discourses inform performances and likewise, how performances inform discourses. Analysing discourses about music and experiences of musicking, of course, forms part of our research as ethnographic interviews are one of the crucial elements of anthropological fieldwork. However, the emphasis in academic discourses has been on the difficulty, if not on the impossibility, to describe in words what we experience musically. This leads us to think mainly in one direction, namely that we need to ‘translate’ our musical experiences into words. As this creates so many challenges, we tend to give less attention to the other direction, i.e. how discourses, in turn, inform our performances. By this, I do not mean discourses as technical or methodological instructions of how to play or learn certain musics, although this can be part of it. Rather, I mean any kind of discourses created by those playing the music, even if at first glance the direct link to the music might not be completely obvious.

My argument here guards against the critique by for example Agawu (2003) and Acosta (2005) (see discussion in the last chapter) that the musicians' own perceptions of their music and their voices were often unheard and dominated by Western (academic) discourses.

My argument is that listening and engaging in discourses can also create certain awareness or inspire us about different ways of musical experience and musicking that before or otherwise we would have never thought about, never experienced, or never felt. I will give a few examples to make my point clearer. I will come back to these examples in chapter 3.3 in which I analyse my own musical experiences with Malagasy music in detail.

- 1.) If the Malagasy musicians had not talked so much about the importance of the *lova-tsofina* to their own music making, I would have never followed this approach myself, doing without any kind of written notation throughout my learning process. And then, in turn, if I had not applied and followed the *lova-tsofina* in my musical practices, my attention would have not been drawn to other important aspects and elements of Malagasy music. I will look at this constant interrelation in detail chapter 3.3.
- 2.) If the topic of the Malagasy language had not appeared so persistently in the discourses of the Malagasy musicians, I probably would have never thought about making use of learning and knowing the lyrics for my playing or thinking about the importance of language for accentuation in music (even for instrumental music).
- 3.) If the Malagasy musicians had not used terms such as “rythme mélodique” (“melodic rhythm”) or “placement de voix” (“placement of the voice”) so often, I would have maybe never questioned my own understanding of ‘rhythm.’ I would have never focussed my attention so much on the interrelation of rhythm and melody while playing and would have hardly understood (and musically felt) what musicians so often described as regional musical differences.
- 4.) If I had not heard so many stories about the relationships between different musicians, about the role of musicians in Madagascar, about certain musical legends; if the musicians had not talked so much about “l’âme Malgache”

(“Malagasy soul”) and about Malagasy cultural and ethical values, I would have never understood that Malagasy music making is always about a certain ‘esprit’ and attitude as well. It is about creating music with which Malagasy people can identify (“se retrouvent”) and about expressing your own personality through musicking at the same time as I shall argue later.

These are only a few examples and it would be easy to continue the list. I haven’t given these examples here to stress my argument that discourses and musical experiences are closely related whilst also informing each other. They should therefore be used and understood in both directions. In fact, it is not only about discourses alone. As I have analysed earlier in this chapter, discourses are often the means through which we make sense of our own experiences (including for example our sentiments/emotions as the last of my example shows). Seeing both, our musical experiences and discourses as interrelated and interdependent is the most fruitful way for the analysis. Instead of only seeing difficulties in ‘translating’ the performance approach into academic writing and difficulties in applying certain discourses to our musical experiences, we should rather see and make use of the connection between the two.

As explained above, Rice (1994) has very much integrated and analysed his own learning and playing of Bulgarian music into his academic research. He explains, for example, how he had discovered a new layer of musical understanding. He realised that physical behaviour, such as hand motions, is of immense importance. At first his learning to play Bulgarian music was very much influenced by Western discourses about music. He then discovered the importance of physical behaviour which for him became what he calls a “conceptual source”:

“(…) whereas my original ideas were determined by Western concepts represented in musical notation, my new understanding added the hand motions necessary to produce the sounds: physical behaviour became part of the conceptual source generating musical ideas” (Rice 1994: 83).

Discourses as well as musical experiences are sources of understanding and often inform each other. It is only through an analysis that integrates both as being in a constant interrelation that I started to understand important aspects and elements of Malagasy

music making, especially concerning the issue of the '6/8 rhythm' 'versus' the *lova-tsofina*, as I will show in section 3, especially in chapter 3.3.

The theoretical framework or methodological approach that I use to support this argument is mainly based on two concepts or methodological propositions, the "*presumption of sameness*" promoted by Agawu (2003) and the "subject-centred ethnography" as proposed by Rice (2003).

"*Presumption of sameness*" (Agawu 2003) and "subject-centred ethnography" (Rice 2003)

As stated in the previous chapter, Agawu with his book "Representing African Music. Postcolonial notes, Queries, Positions" published in 2003 has caused a sensation among many scholars who have worked on African music because of his critique of most research works that have been conducted so far in this field. The main aim of his book is to produce a critique of the discourse about African music (Agawu 2003: xii), arguing that Western academic work on African music has always been a constant search for difference and has produced a persistent emphasis on 'the Other.' Agawu does not propose any concrete methodological instructions in his book of how to undermine those constantly dominating Western discourses "othering" African music. He does, however, suggest what I consider a theoretical proposition about one's attitude as a researcher by arguing for a "*presumption of sameness*" (Agawu 2003: 171). He writes:

"There is no method for attending to sameness, only a presence of mind, an attitude, a way of seeing the world. For fieldworkers who presume sameness rather than difference, the challenge of constructing an ethnographic report would be construed as developing a theory of translation that aims to show how the materiality of culture constrains musical practice in specific ways. The idea would be to unearth the impulses that motivate acts of performance and to seek to interpret them in terms of broader, perhaps even generic cultural impulses" (Agawu 2003: 169).

I have taken this theoretical proposition onto a more concrete level by following some central aspects of Timothy Rice's approach of a "subject-centred ethnography" (Rice 2003). In his article "Time, Place, and Metaphor in Musical Experiences and Ethnography" (2003) Rice proposes this model that incorporates the main theoretical

aspects of what many ethnomusicologists refer to as the “new fieldwork” in ethnomusicology (see discussion above), namely research that reconfigures ‘the field’ as an *experience* rather than a place (Hellier-Tinoco 2003: 25-26). Rice suggests two main directions and aims that we as researchers should follow:

1. He thinks that we need to move

“toward more atomized studies of individuals and small groups of individuals linked perhaps just a moment in time and place by shared beliefs, social status, behaviors, tastes, and experiences of the world (and perhaps not at all by ethnicity).” (Rice 2003: 152)

2. And he further demands that we should be

“understanding these individual beliefs and actions as taking place within a ‘modern world system’ of some sort, a system that at the least challenges, and in some cases seems nearly to obliterate, cultures and societies as ‘traditionally understood’”. (Rice 2003: 152)

I have argued in the last chapter that it is impossible to define the group of musicians I worked with by the musical styles they are playing and composing. I will, however, in the next chapter discuss some aspects that they share and that link all of them, such as their relation and bond to the capital Antananarivo and how this, in turn, is linked to the international ‘world music market.’

“Subject-centred ethnography” is a move away from studying cultures towards studying subjects and the experiences of these subjects. Here, the question comes up of what exactly is a ‘subject’? Rice proposes alternative terms, such as person, individual, self, agent or actor and explains that he uses them “somewhat interchangeably” as his main point is that the subject is “a thoroughly social and self-reflexive being.” Subject-centred ethnography, as he writes, is not about biography and documenting individuality (though it could also be that), but an “account of the social ‘authoring’ ...of the self” (Rice 2003: 157). This goes back to the idea of Mikhail Bakhtin who said that “we get our selves from others” and that identity was construed in a dialogue (Bakhtin 1990 [1919]). The self-perception of the individual under conditions of modernity, Rice argues, is very different from that under pre-modern conditions and he refers to Anthony Giddens who in 1991 wrote in his book “Modernity and Self-Identity”: “What to do? How to act: Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity” (Giddens 1991:70). As I have already explained at the beginning of this chapter, Rice

stresses that experience is not an inner phenomenon, but rather begins with the interaction with the world and with others. One also has to bear in mind that experiences are no longer contained within local, isolated cultures or nation-states but are and have been shaped by “regional, areal, colonial, and global economics, politics, social relations, and images” (Rice 2003: 160). In order to best understand Rice’s model it is useful to briefly look at the theoretical debates this model has been based on and grown out of.

Rice criticises the old ethnomusicological paradigm, represented by for instance Merriam (1964), which sees the world in clearly bounded cultures with relatively static social structures. Main questions that have been asked and investigated are about the relationship of music to other domains of culture and about the role that music plays in the maintenance or change in social systems (as mirror or agent). Today, however, the world needs to be understood as more complex, mobile, and dynamic (Rice 2003: 151). Many researchers have departed towards this direction. To name just a few, Arjun Appadurai (1996) describes a new, “deterritorialised” world of increasingly mobile groups and individuals. He further speaks of a “new condition of neighboredness” that we can enter because of new technologies of travel and documentation (Appadurai 1996: 29). James Clifford (1997) disagrees with Appadurai in the way that he stresses the continuity between globalisation and earlier forms of travel and rootlessness. He says that “[i]ntercultural connection is, and has long been, the norm” (Clifford 1997: 5) and proposes to focus on ‘routes rather than roots’ and on ‘travel rather than dwelling.’

Recent studies on networks of artists from Madagascar, have followed this idea by arguing that artists make use of transnational and translocal networks, but go far beyond the traditional ‘bi-focal’ of communities that link originating and sending countries, as so often and typically studied in diaspora research (Kiwani and Meinhof 2011).

In terms of musical/ethnomusicological research many have recognised and studied the mix of cultural and musical styles. That these are endlessly available around the globe, Rice argues, is only possible because of colonialism as well as because of the ubiquity of electronic media. Erlmann (1993) has studied the commercial genre of ‘world music,’ followed by many other authors, such as Guilbault (1997) or Monson (1999). And a variety of other studies on other, less commercialised forms of transnational music making between homelands and diaspora have been made (Rice 2003: 152-155).

The ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin (1993) has provided a model for these studies and with his work on “Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West” has developed ideas that serve Rice as a starting point for his idea about “subject-centred ethnography.” Slobin’s “suggestive epigram” that “we are all individual music cultures” (Slobin 1993: ix) is of crucial importance to Rice and he argues that by taking this idea of “individual music cultures seriously” he attempts to bring some order to the experience of a chaotic and puzzling contemporary world. Global music making, according to Slobin, should be conceptualised in three different levels: 1. the “subculture” which embraces everything on a local level from families, neighbourhoods, organisational committees, to ethnic groups; 2. the “interculture” which embraces the music industry, diaspora, and affinity groups; and finally 3. the “superculture” which embraces regions, nations, and states.<sup>36</sup> To the third one, Rice also adds Appadurai’s notions of “ethnoscapes,” “technoscapes,” “financescapes,” “mediascapes,” and “ideoscapes.”<sup>37</sup> Though he builds upon these ideas, Rice argues that these are not only cultures, but “social and geographical (or sociographical) locales in which individuals experience music, along with other things” (Rice 2003: 156). Further, he criticises that time is a factor that Slobin did not pay enough attention to and on which he wants to focus. The goals of “subject-centred ethnography” as Rice puts it is “(...) to bring some narrative coherence to the complex and seemingly fragmented world that many social theorists, cultural critics, and ethnomusicologists are writing about” (Rice 2003: 157).

The aspect that is most important to my research is that the model of “subject-centred ethnography” proposes a *shared* space of musical experience and ethnography that encompasses the researcher and the researched alike. Rice argues that although musical experience and ethnography co-occur for both, contestation occurs as individuals are situated very differently in this space of musical experience. Power, for example, can become an issue and can be negotiated and acted out - for example in who controls the discourse (Rice 2003: 174).

Agawu (2003) has given the issue of power also much attention. He argues that “differencing” has produced such ideologically one-sided and politically disadvantageous

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<sup>36</sup> For a detailed account on Slobin’s concepts, see Slobin (1993).

<sup>37</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Appadurai’s notions, see Appadurai (1996).

representation and that by focusing on such more generic impulses (referring to the “*presumption* of sameness”), a cross-cultural vision could be promoted without which the specificity of local practices would be denied (Agawu 2003: 168-169). In that he mirrors aspects of Rice’s model as well. Firstly, the idea of Rice’s model is to move away from the study of cultures towards the study of experiences of individuals and therefore also has the aim to study a *shared* space of musical experience. As already mentioned above, Rice does not in any way deny the issue of power that is inherent for instance in the fact that discourses are controlled and dominated. However, he argues that his model helps to study issues of contestation by looking at the positions of individuals within this space of musical experiences. What Rice describes as his “preconditions” for “subject-centred ethnography,” namely to understand the individual as a “thoroughly social and self-reflexive being” and to understand experience as something that “begins with interaction with a world and with others” already guards against Agawu’s main critique on the consistent emphasis on difference: Rice’s model not only embraces informants or subjects, but encompasses the field worker/ethnomusicologist in the same way. The “*presumption* of sameness” is therefore inherent in the *shared* space of musical experiences and individual positions are analysed in an equal measure.

In order to take this to a more concrete level, in the next chapter I will give a detailed and self-reflexive account of my own field research with Malagasy musicians, reflecting on experiences that I made during ethnographic fieldwork and my own musical practices both, in Antananarivo and in Europe.





## **Chapter 2.3 – Fieldwork experiences**

- Introduction
- Development of my research
- The role of Antananarivo
- Some reflections on my fieldwork in Antananarivo
- Development of my musical practices
- The interrelation of analyses of discourses and musical experiences –  
Outlook: section 3

### Introduction

In this last chapter of section 2, I will focus on my own field research, explaining both, its development and the ways in which I have applied previously discussed methodological and theoretical approaches.

I will first discuss the development of my research, showing how it grew out of previous research and how I further specified research questions and was led to focus on the topic of ‘rhythm.’ This is also linked to the musicians’ relation and bond to the capital Antananarivo that I will explain in more detail. I will then present some reflections on my own field work with Malagasy musicians, also giving examples of experiences and concrete situations. I will discuss the development of my musical practices and finally explain the importance I see in analysing discourses and musical experiences interdependently - which I will then show in my analyses in the following section 3.

### Development of my research

As I have mentioned in the first chapter of this section, my research for this thesis grew out of previous research that I conducted in 2005 for my Master’s dissertation. This earlier research influenced and directed my present work in numerous ways, but especially on two levels: firstly it underpinned the development of my research topic and particular research questions as I will discuss below, and secondly it helped my collaborations and fieldwork on site, such as getting to know and contacting informants, or gaining access to concerts and rehearsals. However, it is important to bear in mind that

using this particular circle of artists as a starting point through whom I met further informants and was directed to certain persons, might have prevented me from making other contacts, as there are many conflicts between artists and certain circles of artists. Rivalry and jealousy seem to be a daily occurrence and my previous research has shown that the situation of a country with practical no cultural policy and therefore very difficult conditions for artists can on the one hand make artists get closer together and become active as the example of the *Rarihasina* cultural centre clearly shows, on the other hand it is exactly the same situation that foments conflicts between artists. It is likely that the current situation with the enduring political crisis only foments these conflicts even more. However, I think that the seven months I spent in Antananarivo and my frequent research trips within Europe over the last three years have still allowed me to ‘cross boundaries.’ Although I tried to avoid rivalry to become a topic, it came up many times in my meetings and encounters with the artists and I often felt uneasy because of it. At the same time, it is also through these conflicts and situations of jealousy that I learnt much about the musicians’ situations, their individual aims and strategies.

As stated in chapter 2.1, the most important influence that my previous research had on my present work was that it propelled my curiosity to focus more on the music itself. What fascinated me most was the unity expressed by the circle of musicians that I had first met in the *Rarihasina* centre despite the great variety of musical styles that they represented. It also corresponded with my experience that generally, with regard to the island’s history, Malagasy culture is very often perceived as a melting pot of various cultures. Especially in the music people often seem to hear sounds which remind them of something familiar from somewhere else.<sup>38</sup> Scholars have conducted research on the different influences on the island’s music (Schmidhofer 1995, Harison 2005); often with a particular regional focus (Edkvist 1997, Emoff 2002) or with regard to the history and development of musical instruments found on the island (Randafison 1980). However, despite the often emphasised regional musical particularities, musicians from different regions easily play together and even more striking, instantly recognise music (also instrumental music) as Malagasy music. Is there a musical response/explanation to this?

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<sup>38</sup> Some examples that I have come across so far when I played Malagasy music to people that had never heard it before are for instance familiarities to Indian music, Moroccan music, Indonesian music, musical styles from East African regions as well as even familiar sounds to music from the Alps.

In other words, what makes the music sound Malagasy? Or simply, what is Malagasy music? I am well aware that these questions are far too vague to be proper research questions for a PhD project. Nevertheless, it was exactly these questions that I had in mind when I went to Antananarivo again after having been there for my Master's field research.

It is a common and well known phenomenon within anthropology that research questions are refined and specified during the process of collecting data. We do not go into 'the field' in order to prove a hypothesis that we have worked out before. Considering that the focus very much lies on relationships and experiences, ethnographic research should be understood as a constant process of understanding this *shared* space of experiences and individual positions as Rice puts it (Rice 2003: 160). I certainly only hit on my particular research topic *during* fieldwork and my research questions developed within this process. I did not particularly think a lot about rhythm in Malagasy music before, though I had always been captivated, if not irritated, by the complex structure of it and by the phenomenon that, especially when listening to the music or even more so when trying to play myself, my feet often tapped differently to the musicians' feet. I concentrated on rhythm and found myself observing tapping feet during concerts, comparing Malagasy and *vazaha*<sup>39</sup> feet. I had discussions, in some cases even arguments, with friends about whether a particular Malagasy piece was in 2 or in 3. In retrospect, however, I would consider these kinds of experiences and trains of thought already part of my fieldwork. Many anthropologists agree that there is "no clear break in the temporal flux," of our research as Watson (1999) describes it, and "the period in the field is simply part of the ongoing temporal experience of coming to an understanding of other people" (Watson 1999: 2). I will come back to the issue that my research is still an on-going process at the end of this chapter.

One might easily think now that I have exactly fallen into Agawu's trap in that my reflections could be read as if I had been deliberately searching for difference and that 'rhythm' (once again!) had been the key to find it. However, I hardly ever brought up the topic of rhythm myself, especially not at the beginning of my research and when I met

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<sup>39</sup> Malagasy term for "foreigner," especially when referring to Europeans. "Vazaha" literally means "well observed."

people for the first time. Sometimes, it happened that a musician, with whom I had been talking for a long time, introduced me to another musician friend with words such as “This is Jenny. She is eager to understand our rhythm. Can you talk to her?” or something similar which made it impossible for me to start a new conversation and see whether the topic of rhythm would be brought up by my dialogue partner. Most of the time, however, it was the musicians themselves who instantly directed the conversation towards the topic of rhythm when we talked about these rather vague questions of what really constitutes Malagasy music. Whereas this obtrusive directing towards the topic of rhythm can be seen as a unifying and rather general phenomenon among the musicians, the way they brought up the topic and what kind of theories, ideas and opinions they expressed about it was immensely diverse as it will become obvious in section 3.

#### The role of Antananarivo

I have introduced the concept of “contemporary music” in the Malagasy context as used by Randrianary (2001) and its close relation to the concept of *lova-tsofina* in chapter 2.1. The concept itself suggests that the focus and definition lies on the attitude of the musicians to embrace new musical forms and create new musical syntheses through using and keeping their ‘tradition.’ It is not a concept describing a particular musical style which would be impossible with regard to the variety and diversity of the musics that I encountered through the musicians I worked with. However, the group of individual musicians that I worked with can further be defined by some elements that they all share. All the musicians I worked with play music that is made for consumption, that is performed on stages and that is often produced on recordings. Their music partly has already or at least is produced with the idea of selling it to the international music market (where most of the time it is labelled as ‘world music’<sup>40</sup>). In other words, it is not the kind of music that is played in functional or ceremonial contexts, such as music played at funerals, in churches or specific music such as trance music. The musicians’ strategies to reach the ‘world music market’ will also be a topic in the next chapter in which I analyse

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<sup>40</sup> The term ‘world music’ was created in 1987 as a marketing category by around 25 representatives of independent record companies, concert promoters, and broadcasters in Britain. See Taylor (1997) or Stoke (2004) for a more detailed account of the emergence of this particular term and category.

how exactly and in which contexts the term ‘6/8 rhythm’ is used by the Malagasy musicians.

What unites the musicians most is their relation and bond to the capital Antananarivo. Most of the musicians I worked with are based in Antananarivo or frequently pass by there. I have also worked with Malagasy musicians who are based in Europe. Among them, many come from Antananarivo and definitely for all of them the capital has been a place of great importance, being a sort of ‘trampoline’ for their musical career. Kiwan and Meinhof (2011) have conducted research on the transnational networks of individual artists from North Africa and Madagascar, looking at the musicians’ personal narratives and following their practices in different locations across Africa and Europe. They argue that one cannot overestimate the significant role that “metropolitan centres of the South,” such as Casablanca or Antananarivo, play as hubs in the networks of these individual artists (Kiwan and Meinhof 2011: chapter 2). Antananarivo is described as a “place of fear and desire, jealousy and triumph – and the passage obligé for all but a few musicians en route for transnational migration” (Kiwan and Meinhof 2011: chapter 2). The reason why this is the case, they argue, is the steadily growing facilities of the music industry. Further, international cultural institutions and embassies have their domicile in the capitals, and especially in Antananarivo, it is these institutions that remain the main supporters for local artists (Kiwan and Meinhof 2011: chapter 3; see also Fuhr 2006). However, without denying that most artists have experienced Antananarivo as a possible gate-way and have somehow profited from the capital’s infrastructure; the on-going political crisis according to some of the musicians that I am being regularly in touch with has had a negative impact on the musicians’ possibilities, also in the capital. Almost all of the musicians I worked with have already travelled abroad from Madagascar, mainly to Europe or the U.S. In some cases, musicians have visited nearer places, such as La Réunion, Mauritius or neighbouring countries on the African continent where they have gained some intercultural musical experience at music festivals or the like. Further, most of the musicians I have met in Europe frequently return to Madagascar for concerts or to ‘resource’ their inspiration as many describe it. These experiences have also shaped their discourses as much as their musical practices as I will analyse in section 3.

### Some reflections on my own fieldwork in Antananarivo

All in all I conducted more than 40 interviews with Malagasy musicians in Madagascar and in Europe. In addition to this, there have been numerous informal conversations, every time before or after concerts or rehearsal, when visiting people at their homes, when meeting someone by chance in a café or on the street, in the CD shop or at market stalls buying CDs and cassettes. Even if it was no proper interviews as such, I gained very useful information and ideas through these encounters. I also had the chance to interview people who are somehow connected with musicians and their business, such as cultural journalists, music producers or choreographers and dancers. I conducted almost all interviews in French; a second language for me as well as for most of my interview partners. My knowledge of Malagasy is basic, but it still helped me to gain some valuable knowledge as I often asked for specific definitions, terms and concepts in Malagasy. I did not feel any sort of language barrier during my research. Rather to the contrary, the fact that I am not a French native speaker was often perceived with a kind of benevolence, if not relief and therefore very much facilitated conversations and exchange. In general, I have made the experience that the attitude of many Malagasy people towards France and French people is still very much shaped by the colonial history of the island. The present political crisis is another testimony that the ex-colonial political power of France is still very influential.

I conducted open and explorative ethnographic interviews and engaged in participant observation, for example during concerts and rehearsals, that resulted in a very detailed field note diary. In addition, numerous recordings, pictures and films of concerts and rehearsals form part of my data. Local daily newspapers with concert reviews and announcements as well as posters announcing concerts or other cultural events have also turned out to be a very useful source. However, especially important to me were the experiences that I gained through participating in musical activities myself which I will discuss in detail below.

Despite my confidence that the topic of ‘rhythm’ was not planned at all from my side, but that I hit on it during my field research, there are a few circumstances that need to be considered and that will bring us full-circle back to the discussion presented in the last

chapter as they touch upon the very important anthropological task of being self-reflexive. I have already mentioned the issue of rivalry. However, being a student, unmarried, female and from a European country, mainly working with male artists in an environment often dominated by jealousy, was not a problem as big as I had imagined it would be, though there were certainly situations where I felt uncomfortable because of this. At the same time, I think that it might have also helped me sometimes to get to know people. The fact that I am and also that I presented myself not only as a university PhD student, but also as a musician, had a far greater influence than I would have imagined beforehand. First of all, I think, as it puts them, the musicians, and me on a sort of same level. Although I am trained in Western classical and baroque music, playing violin and recorders, the idea of talking from musician to musician added another dimension with regard to 'shared experiences' and very much facilitated and opened conversations. My experience here mirrors other researchers' experiences that I already discussed in the previous chapter. On the other hand, the fact that the musicians knew about my Western musicological training have certainly had an impact on their choice of words and our discourse in general. The whole debate on the concept of the '6/8 rhythm,' analysed and discussed in detail in the next chapter has probably been influenced, maybe to some extent even caused by the fact that the musicians knew that they directed their ideas and explanations towards me, someone with that particular background. The fact that our conversation language was French might also have boosted the emphasis on the '6/8 rhythm,' considering that it is a concept grown out of Western music theory as explained in chapter 2.1. Having said this, there was discord among the musicians whether a term for 'rhythm' in Malagasy language actually exists. I often asked for a translation of the '6/8 rhythm' and was either told that there was not any word for it or was answered indirectly, arguing that it was the foreigners calling it '6/8 rhythm.' I will come back to the musicians' individual usage of the term in the next chapter.

Something which seems to be a normal development within research, as also the example given by Titon (1997) in the last chapter shows, is that my role and especially the perception of me and my role by the musicians often varied. Many of them definitely saw a potential window to the Western music market in me (whether true or not does not even play such a big role as it nevertheless influenced my relationship with them). This is also



an issue raised by Mallet (2009) who worked in South-Western Madagascar on *tsapiky* music for a long period of time. He writes that a *vazaha* who is interested in music is directly regarded as a producer (Mallet 2009: 25). Mallet therefore describes how he tried to create a relationship with the musicians that was different to the musicians' a priori expectations and hopes:

« Il fallait que je leur fasse comprendre et accepter une relation à l'autre, par le biais de leur musique, différente de celle qu'ils connaissent et pour laquelle ils ont des outils, des repères construits sur la base d'argent, repères qui constituent aussi des formes de défenses, de protections. Il fallait que j'atténue progressivement cette double extériorité du producteur *vazaha*, cet a priori qui m'était naturellement assigné. J'ai tenté d'effacer les « Monsieur Julien » et de dépasser les discours tout faits, liés aux opportunités que je pouvais représenter, l'ambiguïté d'un rapport fondé à la fois sur la méfiance des musiciens et sur leur espoir de voir leurs parcours se prolonger jusqu'*andafy* (à l'extérieur, à l'étranger) » (Mallet 2009 : 25).<sup>41</sup>

Questions of reciprocity come to the fore during research as they naturally do within human relationships. As Hellier-Tinoco (2003) has rightly stated, field research is real life and we are often taken by surprise or are even being pulled into some sort of "field politics" by our fieldwork participants (Hellier-Tinoco 2003: 24, 32). I have definitely been taken by surprise many times which I would like to further explain with an example: A musician who invited me to come to a rehearsal at his house, picked me up with a taxi. While driving in the taxi, I realised that we were going a completely different way (which I could only tell as I had been to his house before). I therefore asked where we were going and he said that he needed to pick up something from a friend. We parked just in front of the Ministry of culture. When I proposed to wait in the car, he persuaded me to come with him as it would not take long and we could have a chat while waiting. I suddenly found myself in a big black leather chair, facing this 'friend' – an official from the Ministry. Although I did not say a word, my Malagasy was good enough to understand that the musician was begging money for himself – though in my name – as

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<sup>41</sup> "I had to make them understand and accept a new form of relationship based on their music. This relationship was different to what they knew and to the rules they were used to, e.g. rules based on money and which also worked as a form of protection. I had to gradually weaken the double exteriority of a *vazaha* producer that had been naturally assigned to me. I tried to stop them calling me "Mister Julien" and to go beyond both, the already fixed discourses that were linked to what I could offer them, and the ambiguity of our relationship based on their mistrust but also on their hope that I would help them find their way to *andafy* (abroad)" (my translation).

my research definitely would prove his music to be worth supporting. It worked and although I will never know for sure, I somehow still had the feeling that the official understood what was going on.

The fact of my being a musician also added another dimension with regard to my role as the researcher and *shared* experiences which again, I would like to explain with an example: The last time I went to Antananarivo in summer 2008 I did not take my own violin with me as I was afraid that the tropical weather conditions could damage the instrument. During my stay, I still wanted to play and was hoping to find a way to borrow a violin. This idea turned into a three days search with numerous phone calls and endless taxi and bus journeys through which I not only got to know new parts of Antananarivo, but many new people, musicians, music shops, and instrument makers. Even more importantly, people got to know me as well. I received phone calls from people I did not know before who had heard that I was looking for a violin. The whole process of searching for a violin propelled the people's interest in me onto a new level. When I finally found a violin, the bridge broke after a few days (probably because of the sultry tropical weather!) which took me on another two days journey through Antananarivo, trying to find a new bridge. Again with the help of many people I finally found one in a small music shop. When I sat down in the corner of this shop in order to try to affix the bridge to the violin, I was soon surrounded by a group of people observing me and taking pictures of me 'at work,' and I became the one telling *my* story and answering questions. The more I get engaged in musical practices and especially in live performances and concerts, the more often I get the feeling that I also become the 'researched.' Often after concerts, people, especially Malagasy, of the audience come to ask me how I got interested in Malagasy music and how I was capable of learning this music that was 'so different.' Here, the topic of rhythm also comes up as people often ask especially how I managed to understand and play the rhythm correctly. Also musicians that I play with often ask the same questions and are interested in and often astonished of why I do not use any musical notation. It already happened that musicians asked me to notate the music we were playing – a request that I had to politely decline as first of all, I have been following and learning the *lova-tsofina*, but also I am in fact incapable of writing down this music in Western notation, at least if I wanted the notation to represent what we

played. To the question “Jenny, you should be able to explain the 6/8 correctly,” I had to answer a few times that I would be happy to explain how usually the ‘6/8 rhythm’ was understood and used in Western music theory, but that I personally felt that it was not the right term to describe Malagasy music. In fact, I realised that when I mentioned the *lova-tsofina* in any of these conversations and explained that it was also through this concept and approach (i.e. *not* using any kind of notation) that I started to learn the music, Malagasy people on the one hand seem to immediately agree and often show their appreciation that I recognise this Malagasy concept. However, they also seem to be surprised, if not slightly disappointed, often arguing that someone was needed who was capable of explaining Malagasy music to Western listeners and musicians in their language, i.e. using Western notation.

It is also through internet sources, such as videos of concerts that people comment or ask questions about me, a *vazaha* playing Malagasy music, and further internet networking has also got me in touch with other people interested in Malagasy music who for example were searching for particular sources or information.

#### Development of my musical practices

In terms of my musical practices, I have gained much more experience playing and performing with Malagasy musicians in Europe than in Madagascar. For a few reasons: First of all, I have mainly learned and played with singer and guitarist Erick Manana (alias Erick Rafilipomanana) and numerous musicians that regularly play with him in various musical formations. Originally from Antananarivo, he has been living in Bordeaux for more than twenty years, but still continues to regularly perform in Madagascar as well. Erick Manana is member of the group “Lolo sy ny tariny” that was founded in the 70s by a circle of highschool friends. They still perform, although very rarely, and similarly to the group “Mahaleo,” their fans can be found across all generations, their lyrics are known by heart by everyone and their songs since more than thirty years are still being played on the radio. He has further founded the group “Feo Gasy” with legendary flute player Rakoto Frah (alias Philibert Rabazoza) who died in 2001. As promised to Rakoto Frah, the group still continues to perform without him and just recently, in August this year, gave a huge concert in the capital for several thousands

of their fans. Erick Manana performs solo, but also in various smaller formations with Malagasy musician friends of him. For more than sixteen years he has also been accompanying the singer Graeme Allwright and is member of the group “Madagascar AllStars.” With Erick Manana, we have regularly performed in France, but also in Canada – most of the time, though there have been some exceptions, for Malagasy audiences. Another reason that has prevented me from performing more in Madagascar is the enduring political crisis as I have not yet been able to travel back to the island since summer 2008. Finally, also university work, teaching requirements and last but not least this PhD thesis have taken much energy and time and rather allowed for some shorter research and concert trips within Europe than travelling to the Southern hemisphere. However, the spatial, but also the temporal ‘distance’ between many interviews conducted in Madagascar and musical experiences that I gained performing in Europe does not mean that I looked at or analysed these experiences separately. In contrary, as I will explain at the end of this chapter, it has been a constant going back and forth in my analyses, looking at the interrelation of discourses and experiences of musicking and it still is, in this moment of writing, an on-going process.

Although at the beginning it might have appeared less obvious for me, I now find it much easier to approach and play Malagasy music with my violin and recorders – instruments that I have played and learned from early childhood on. I had also started to learn the Malagasy bamboo zither *valiha*<sup>42</sup> and a few percussion instruments from scratch while being in Antananarivo. The examples I give in chapter 3.3 will explain how exactly I approached and learned the music with my instruments.

The violin is not a foreign instrument in Madagascar. There is an indigenous Malagasy violin, called *lokanga*, which is nowadays mainly played in the region of the Bara people (in Southern Madagascar). In the High Plateaux region the *lokanga* has almost completely been replaced by the European violin (Randrianary 2001: 155).<sup>43</sup> However, regarding playing style and playing techniques there are important and also instructive differences to the Western classical way that I will point out in chapter 3.3. Concerning flutes, neither the European transverse flute, nor treble recorders are extremely popular or

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<sup>42</sup> For more information on the *valiha*, see Randafison (1980), or Randrianary (2001).

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed account on the arrival and use of European instruments in Madagascar, see Harison (2005).

common in Madagascar. Throughout the island the Malagasy flute called *sodina*, made out of bamboo, wood or plastic is played, though there are regional differences regarding for instance the tuning.<sup>44</sup>

My very first experience of musicking Malagasy music was listening to a CD that I had found rather by chance. It was part of my father's CD collection at our family's house, a recording of various Malagasy groups that was done in the 1990s in Germany and that formed part of the "World Music Network series" produced by German radio WDR.<sup>45</sup> Listening to this CD did not only spark the greatest emotional response to music I had ever felt before, but also an insatiable curiosity to get to know better and not at least to understand this music and why it had this strong effect on me.

It was definitely some kind of "initial experience," as Rice (1994) would describe it (see discussion in the previous chapter), which was followed by the immediate urge to find more recordings of Malagasy music, get to know Malagasy musicians and attend concerts and rehearsal and especially by many attempts to play along and learn with recordings at home.

Inevitable, this led to my very first research trip to Madagascar in spring 2005. One of the very first things I did in Antananarivo was to find myself a teacher to start learning the most famous Malagasy instrument, the *valiha*. Doné Andriambaliha, my teacher at the *Rarihasina* Cultural Centre, insisted on me learning by ear – we generally recorded every lesson – as well as teaching me a bit of Malagasy percussion instrument *koritsana* in order to better understand accentuation and underlying rhythmical patterns. I very much enjoyed starting a completely new instrument from scratch and gaining a certain repertory of Malagasy songs from the High Plateaux region. However, it takes much time to learn the basic technical skills on a new instrument and sometimes I thought that I would like to feel more comfortable technically on the instrument in order to concentrate on the actual moments of musicking. All the more happier I was when in 2006 I got to know singer and guitarist Erick Manana who immediately encouraged me to try to use my violin.

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<sup>44</sup> For more information on the *sodina* flute, see Randrianary (2001): 110-111.

<sup>45</sup> Licensed and edited by WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk) (1993) *Madagascar*. Germany, Network Medien GmbH, LC 6759.

He started to teach me many of his own compositions and songs from the High Plateaux region. Again, I never took any notes, but learned by ear and only used recordings to memorise new tunes. My little experience of *valiha* playing has helped me a great deal – and still is helping – in so far as so much in Malagasy music, for example regarding playing techniques or ornamentation has its origin in *valiha* music. I will come back to this in chapter 3.3. I had not played any public concerts with Malagasy music until Erick Manana invited me to perform one song with him at his concert at the “Olympia” music hall in Paris in November 2009. He persuaded me as he was convinced that the Malagasy audience<sup>46</sup> would be delighted to see a *vazaha* musician performing on her violin in ‘proper Malagasy style.’ During the last days with intensive rehearsals with all musicians somewhere in the outskirts of Paris, we took a very spontaneous decision: I had brought one of my recorders, thinking that there might be opportunities with so many musicians to experiment and play together. It was my Renaissance soprano recorder which I prefer to all my other recorders because of its strong and yet soft as well as very variable sound. I had never played any Malagasy music with my recorder before. However, the legendary Malagasy flutist Rakoto Frah (who died in 2001) was one of the long-time musical companions of Erick Manana, both members of the group “Feo Gasy.” To my greatest regret, I had not had the chance to meet Rakoto Frah personally. I know the few recordings of him by heart, have seen a few rare video recordings of him and have had the immense chance to listen to hundreds of stories about him by Malagasy people, especially musicians, who played with him at the time. I spontaneously tried to play the song “Bitika” that we had prepared with my violin on this Renaissance recorder the evening before the concert. It worked astonishingly well so that we decided that I would change instruments during the song, taking the recorder out as a surprise in the second half of the song. I will come back to Rakoto Frah and to the reaction of the audience towards my playing at the “Olympia” in chapter 3.3. Although I never properly learned Malagasy flute playing before this particular event, I could say that I had done so indirectly and unconsciously: listening to recordings, watching videos, transferring already learned knowledge and experiences from my violin and *valiha* playing onto the

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<sup>46</sup> As Erick Manana had expected, although there were *vazahas* in the audience (even from other European countries, such as Sweden, Germany, or Norway), the majority was Malagasy.

recorder, and above all, remembering every little detail and re-listening again and again to stories and memories of Rakoto Frah to an extent that it almost feels like I actually knew him.

It is not exaggerated to say that the concert at the “Olympia” has become a kind of turning point in my musical life. Since then, I have performed regularly with Erick Manana and his musicians playing both, violin and recorder, have taken part in recording sessions, and I am constantly working on extending my repertory. The most recent projects are the ‘malagasising’ of standard jazz tunes and *manouche* tunes<sup>47</sup> that we performed at the Festival “Nuits Atypiques” in Langon<sup>48</sup> in July and the following-on project of ‘malagasising’ Brazilian *bossa nova* tunes<sup>49</sup> that we will soon record.

A rather different and yet somehow complementary experience of musicking with other Malagasy musicians was my encounter with *hira gasy* musicians from Feonarivo in March 2010 in Germany. Complementary in the way that *hira gasy* music is the music that Erick Manana grew up with and which can be seen as one of his main inspirational sources of his music. I have come across numerous descriptions of *hira gasy* – ‘peasant’s theatre,’ ‘Malagasy street opera,’ a ‘mixture of polyphonic singing, orchestra, and acrobatic’ or ‘Malagasy theatre à la Brecht’ to name but a few. The variety of elements and influences that can be found in *hira gasy* performances has also attracted researchers from different disciplines (see for example Edkvist 1997, Didier 2001, or Vatan 2004). In general, it is the music most associated with the High Plateaux region of the island. There was also one track of *hira gasy* music on one of the very first recordings that I had found of Malagasy music.<sup>50</sup> In collaboration with the “Theater an der Ruhr” (Theatre in Mülheim, Germany), the German radio station WDR and the cultural secretariat of the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia we managed to invite for the first time ever a

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<sup>47</sup> For a detailed account on *manouche* music and the legendary *manouche* guitar player Django Reinhardt, see Gelly and Fogg (2005) and Dregni (2006).

<sup>48</sup> The concert at the Festival Nuits Atypiques in Langon in July 2010 was in a way symbolic to me as it was exactly on that stage that legendary flute player Rakoto Frah performed with the group “Feo Gasy” shortly before he died and where the CD “Ramano” was produced which has always been one of my main sources of Malagasy flute music.

<sup>49</sup> For an introduction to Brazilian *bossa nova* music, please see McGowan and Pessanha (1998): chapter 3.

<sup>50</sup> Life-Special: Ensemble Rainizanabary (1989): *Madagaskar 1. Musik aus Antananarivo*. Germany, Feuer und Eis, fuc 704, track 15.

*hira gasy* group to perform on German stages.<sup>51</sup> This project allowed me to spend a very intensive time with these artists. Despite a rather strict and very dense timetable, we found moments to play together and I profited from attending all rehearsals, recording sessions, and live performances.

### Interrelation analysis of discourses and musical experiences – outlook: section 3

The fact that I have described the development of my musical experience under a subheading does not mean that these experiences should be seen separated from other fieldwork activities, such as my interviews conducted in Antananarivo. I often go back to my interviews, read through them again or listen to them and I have realised that my musical experiences have helped me to better understand or see and analyse these discourses differently. In turn, reading, listening to, re-discussing or reflecting upon these discourses has also helped me to further develop my musical skills. Discourses inspire and inform my musical practices as much as musicking helps to understand discourses. This constant interrelation will be the focus of the next section, especially of chapter 3.3. As argued earlier, the moment I am writing this thesis, this process of analysing both interdependently still continues as I am also continuing to gain musical experiences and to speak about, discuss, and reflect upon Malagasy music. It is research in progress. In this section, I have presented and discussed my main theoretical and methodological framework. The following section with my analyses will show how I applied the approach of focussing on individuals and on individual experiences (including my own) and how I analysed discourses and experiences of musicking as being interrelated. In the

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<sup>51</sup> The initial idea of bringing a *hira gasy* group to Germany was born during one of many meetings with a Malagasy friend of mine, Hasina Samoelinanja, who works as Malagasy teacher, tourist guide, translator and who is also a professional *kabary* (speaker) in Madagascar (kabary forms also part of a *hira gasy* performance). This idea made me contact Rolf Hemke who is working at the “Theater an der Ruhr” which organises many Africa related music and theatre projects. The project with the *hira gasy* group “Rajeana-Marie” from Feonarivo was then organised by the “Theater an der Ruhr” (Mülheim an der Ruhr) within their series “Klanglandschaften Afrika” (“Soundscapes Africa”) in collaboration with the German radio WDR3 (Cologne) and the Kultursekretariat NRW (cultural secretariat of the federal state of North-Rhine Westphalia). It included two days of studio recording and three live performances for the first time ever on a German stage with the performances particularly adapted to a German speaking audience. For more information, please see: <http://www.wdr3.de/open-soundworld/details/artikel/hira-gasy-2.html> (accessed 31.8.2010). I was officially in charge of supporting the artists throughout their stay in Germany (the very first trip ever outside Madagascar for all members of the ensemble), giving me the chance to attend the project from beginning to end.



first two chapters I will try to follow what Agawu (2003) has suggested and demanded, namely listening to and giving a voice to the musicians' own concepts, theories, and ideas, such as the importance of the *lova-tsofina*. The last chapter of the section will then also integrate more my own experiences of musicking.

### **Section 3 - Analyses**

#### **Introduction Section 3 – Analyses**

This section consists of three chapters in which I will discuss my analyses. Whereas the first two chapters focus more on the musicians' discourses, the last chapter has my own musical practices as major concern. Chapter 3.1 looks at the terminological confusion around the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' in the Malagasy context; chapter 3.2 explores the *lova-tsofina* and analyses the musicians' own theories on the origin and meaning of 'rhythm' in Madagascar; and chapter 3.3 through examples of my own musical practices and by referring back to the previous chapters shows how discourses inform musical practices and how in turn, musical experiences help to understand and analyse discourses. I will argue throughout the section that even if for the purpose of clear arrangement I divided my analyses in different chapters, they are nevertheless all interrelated. I have analysed discourses and experiences gained through musicking interdependently.

In addition to my argument that discourses and musical experiences need to be understood and analysed in a constant interrelation, identity issues occur as a central theme throughout the section. I have discussed questions of identity in the previous section, not only as to how music can be a powerful tool in identity construction, but also how questions of identity come to the fore in methodological reflections on anthropological and ethnomusicological fieldwork, e.g. with regard to being a researcher and a participating musician at the same time.

There are two practical issues that I would like to point out: 1. I decided to leave the quotations of the interviews with the musicians in the original language French as little nuances or the particularity concerning choice of words or expressions are often rather difficult to capture in translations. All interview quotes in this section are numbered consecutively. Please see Appendix I for translations into English.<sup>52</sup> 2. Considering the high number of musicians that I encountered and worked with and that appear in this section, I can only give a very brief introduction to each of them the first time they appear in the text. Further, I will generally call them by their artist's name or first name (which is often the same), but will give their full name the first time they are mentioned.

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<sup>52</sup> p. 209ff.



### Chapter 3.1 - Contesting the '6/8 rhythm'

- Introduction
- Speech about music / Language and identity
- The presence of the term '6/8 rhythm' in the musicians' discourses
- The '6/8 rhythm' as used in Western musicology
- '6/8 rhythm' meets *lova-tsofina*
- The importance of the research context
- The term '6/8 rhythm' in the Malagasy context
  - The musicians' usage of the term '6/8 rhythm': identification or taking distance?
  - Terminological confusion
  - Example *salegy*
- The challenge of the international 'world music market' – musicians' individual experiences: perspectives and strategies
- Conclusion

#### Introduction

In this first chapter of section 3 I will analyse the musicians' discourses on and their individual experiences with the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm.' Many Malagasy musicians describe the existence of an enormous cultural and musical diversity as a typical characteristic for their country. This as well as the growing number of transnational musical projects and the challenges of the international 'world music market' put identity issues more and more to the fore and the musicians themselves very much reflect upon questions related to their own (musical) identity. As much as the two following chapters, my analysis of the musicians' discourses on the Western term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' will focus on identity issues as the musicians' discourses offer perspectives on processes of identity construction and their perception of 'Self' and 'Other.' I will therefore begin this first chapter of section 3 by a short excursion on some more theoretical aspects of speech about music and how language is related to identity,

following on from some methodological ideas concerning identity issues that I already discussed in the previous section.

Building on chapter 2.2 I will then explain in further depth the meaning and definition of the concept of '6/8 rhythm' as used in Western musicology. As already explained, in Western musicology this concept is rooted in the idea of musical notation. At first glance, this creates some confusion as it seems to correlate with the *lova-tsofina*, the Malagasy concept of oral tradition. However, with regard to these apparent contradictions, it is important to look at when and how musicians make use of the concept and term. First, I will look at the specificity of their discourses with regard to my particular research context. As there is no shared or agreed terminology among the musicians I will analyse the musicians' *individual* usage and understanding of the term and concept. In order to better understand the different levels of terminological confusion inherent in the musicians' discourses, I will analyse in detail the example of their discourses on *salegy*. *Salegy* is one of the Malagasy musical styles fairly well known internationally and successful on the 'world music market.' It therefore relates to the next part in which I examine the role of '6/8 rhythm' in a wider, global context, i.e. what role it plays in the musicians' attempts and strategies to access the international music market.

### Speech about music / Language and identity

As I already discussed in chapter 2.2, ethnomusicologists have intensively debated about methodological aspects concerning the analysis of speech about music and musical phenomena. They have mentioned advantages and possibilities of language as a tool for analysis and at the same time have shown its difficulties, especially in comparison to the analysis of musical practices. Many of the discussions concern the emic and etic perspectives and the sense of the 'Self' and the 'Other,' reflecting upon the fieldworker's role as much as on ethical issues and the impact of fieldwork in general. The general tendency is to focus on *experiences* including those of the fieldworkers themselves. This demands a high degree of self-reflexivity which mirrors Agawu's idea of a "*presumption of sameness*" (Agawu 2003) which I introduced earlier.

Before coming back to Agawu's arguments concerning the "*presumption of sameness*," I will briefly point out significant arguments concerning language and identity and the

analysis of discourses from a socio-linguistic angle. Michael A. K. Halliday (1978) argues that languages evolve according to people's need to think and speak about oneself and one's relation to other people in a particular situation. He writes that "language arises in the life of the individual through an ongoing exchange of meanings with significant others" (Halliday 1978: 1). Language can therefore be seen as a "product of the social process." Halliday has coined the expression of "language as social semiotic" which suggests interpreting language in its sociocultural context, while interpreting the culture itself in semiotic terms. Through the act of exchanging meanings in everyday life, "(...) people act out the social structure, affirming their own statuses and roles, and establishing and transmitting the shared systems of value and knowledge" (Halliday 1978: 2). Hence, language is also always about identities and reveals much about how people construct their identities through words and within conversation. This has been intensively researched by discourse analysts Meinhof and Galasinski (2005) for example, who have coined the term of a "language of belonging" (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005). They explain that identity needs to be understood as a "discursive construct which continually shifts in the local contexts in which social actors enter" (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005: 7). Language in this respect is a powerful tool and should be regarded as "the means through which we reflect, create position and confirm ourselves in our continuously changing social worlds" (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005: 12). It is through the (re-)formulating of ideas and within dialogues and interaction with others that identities are constructed. Identities are therefore always context-bound. They are relational as people similarly deal with the question of 'who I am' and the question of 'who I am not.' Further, we need to bear in mind that "[a]s much as we might think that our self-constructions are our own, we always draw upon socially available resources with which we construct our experience of ourselves and the reality surrounding us" (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005: 7). This also means that constructions of identities in local contexts are shaped by various discourses that are available to us and that identities also always relate to national, ethnic, gender or age (meta-) narratives which are shared for instance at the level of a nation or a social group:

"The local negotiation of identity is not based merely on locally appropriate discourse or our own stories. (...) we see the local project of identity as being framed not only by a myriad of intersubjective narratives of group affiliations, but

also as provided by the public discourses available to the social actor” (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005: 10).

The question of how discourses are shaped and how different discourses also intertwine will be of particular importance in my analysis of the discourse and terminological confusion on the term and concept of ‘rhythm’ and that of ‘6/8 rhythm’ in particular. Also among many ethnomusicologists, the idea about language and discourses that construct identities are shared, and many works have been published in the range of “anthropological linguistics,” “culture and cognition,” “ethnography of speaking,” or “ideational theories of culture” (Feld 1981: 22). However, the ethnomusicologist Steven Feld who studied the music theory of the Kaluli people in Papua New Guinea warns that by equating the existence of thought with the use of words, one can easily get the false impression that all musical experiences are translatable into a linguistic form and are talked about. He argues, that for the Kaluli people many things lack equivalent lexical items, which it would make misleading to understand language as a “carbon copy of perception.”

“My occasional inventions or extensions of Kaluli concepts were met with laughter enough times to make it clear that there are aspects of musical structure that one does not converse about” (Feld 1981: 42-43).

Feld even regards music as a sort of language in its own right. He explains that even though we all have the urge to find expressions for music and musical experiences, we all know that music finally can express something that cannot be described with any words.

“They [the informants] are caught in a moment of interpretive time, trying to fore awareness to words. They are telling us how much they assume that we understand *exactly* what they are experiencing. In fact, we *do* understand exactly what they are experiencing. We take it as socially typical that people can talk this way about music, stinging together expressives, and we assume that this confirms what we are all supposed to know: that at some level, one just cannot say with words what music says without them” (Feld 1984: 14).

However, he also agrees that when people verbally express something about music it can tell us much about “such abstractions as value, identity, and world sense” (Feld 1984: 14).

On that score, musicologist Agawu argues for a “*presumption of sameness*” that also implies giving a voice to the musicians themselves (the ‘researched’) as this attitude might also influence our theoretical studies of musicians’ discourses. He writes that it is important to recognise that concepts expressed in one’s own language do not necessarily correspond with other concepts expressed in other languages. The aim should therefore be to focus on peoples’ own languages and their practice of critical reflection instead of only concentrating on what our own Western discourse deems relevant. Agawu illustrates this with the example of the Venda people in South Africa who do not have a corresponding term for our concept of “absolute music.”

“A premise of sameness might also reorient our studies of theoretical (including aesthetic) discourses by causing us to regard with suspicion some of what is reported to have been said by informants in their own languages. Languages evolve according to need, and needs are defined across the spectrum of human activities. (...) The ‘fact,’ for example, that there are no terms corresponding directly with ‘music’ in many African languages – a fact, incidentally, that has caused difference-seeking ethnotheorists to rejoice – is significant only in a restricted sense. Its significance is retrospective, not prospective. What matters is not what is known but what lies in the realm of imaginative possibility. The issue is not, ‘Do the Venda have a term for ‘absolute music’?’ but the more dynamic conception whereby changes in the material circumstances of the Venda breed changes in cultural practices that in turn make it possible for them, if they so desire, to articulate ideas about ‘absolute music’. This future-oriented appraisal paves the way for empowerment in that it places the accent not on what an objectifying Western discourse deems significant but on the potential of African languages to support a self-sufficient and sophisticated practice of critical reflection” (Agawu 2003: 170).

As already discussed within the methodology chapter, I have conducted most interviews in French – a second language to me as well as to most of the musicians. I have nevertheless often asked for specific Malagasy terms and concepts and the musicians’ emphasis on the *lova-tsofina* shows that despite our communication language being mainly French, musicians pointed at and emphasised their own indigenous concepts as well. My analyses of the musicians’ discourses show that there is discordance among the musicians whether a direct translation of the word and concept of ‘rhythm’ even exists in the Malagasy language and that there is much terminological confusion. I think that one of Agawu’s main ideas exemplified in this quote above is that languages evolve according to people’s need to express and reflect upon things, situations, or feelings and



that it is therefore always context-related. With regard to my specific research context and also to my approach of focusing on individual musicians' experiences, I will look especially at how exactly musicians individually use, understand, and deal with the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm.'

#### The presence of the term '6/8 rhythm' in the musicians' discourses

There are several reasons why I take the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' as the central theme of this chapter. As I already explained in the previous section, it was not that I deliberately searched for or decided on the topic of rhythm for my research project. Rather, the persistent discourses on rhythm among the Malagasy musicians directed my focus of research. Within these discourses, the term '6/8 rhythm' is consistently present and seems to be of significant relevance to the musicians. However, their individual usage, understanding and feeling towards this particular term and concept varies a great deal. As the '6/8 rhythm' is a term and concept rooted in Western musicology, I will briefly come back to the understanding, usage and meaning of it in the Western musicological context.

#### The '6/8 rhythm' as used in Western musicology

The Western understanding of the term and concept of a '6/8 rhythm' is rooted in the idea of musical notation. As already discussed in more detail in chapter 2.1, it was during the Renaissance period that it became common practice for Western composers and musicians to divide and measure music (Van Leeuwen 1999: 37). Measuring music and grouping it into entities, such as for example 3/4 or 6/8, implies a distinction and alternation of strong and weak beats that until nowadays forms part of the basis of all definitions in dictionaries as well as of education at music schools and conservatories (Arom 1991: 180). When the bar line was first introduced around the early fifteenth century, it did not necessarily always coincide with a strong beat. The rule that main beats are preceded with bar lines only developed after the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>53</sup> As Dudley (1996) explains, the notion of measure in music lets Western musicians and music listeners assume a consistent accentuation of metric pulses, which would be the

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<sup>53</sup> Hiley, David: *Bar*. In: *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/01972> (accessed 11.06.09).

first and fourth note in a 6/8 metre (Dudley 1996: 272). In order to make this point clearer, I would like to give a typical example of the usage and notation of a ‘6/8 rhythm’ in the Western context. This will later then also help to understand my experiences that I made through learning through the *lova-tsofina*, i.e. *not* using any written notation. A very well-known piece in a ‘6/8 rhythm’ in Western classical music is the “Andante graziose” in the piano sonata in A major by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The 6/8 is indicated at the beginning of the piece and the assumed accentuation on the first and fourth eights in each bar is even more emphasised by the phrasing curves, which group together the first three eights in each of the first two bars:



Excerpt of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's piano sonata A major, K 331 (300i).<sup>54</sup>

The fact that the Western understanding of a ‘6/8 rhythm’ is so closely linked to or even based on musical notation becomes a matter of special importance considering that, apart from one or two exceptions, none of the musicians I have worked with reads or writes music. All of them are autodidacts and many of them were very eager on telling me about how they learned to play or compose music by listening to the radio, by watching and listening to fellow musicians or just by hanging around in the streets of the city. These learning experiences are also often reflected in song lyrics and songs are dedicated to

<sup>54</sup> In: Mozart, Klaviersonaten Band 2, Urtext-Ausgabe von Walther Lampe, München-Duisburg (Henle-Verlag) 1955: p. 160.

other musicians or places of learning.<sup>55</sup> The musicians actually often describe their inability to read music as an asset, referring to Madagascar as a country of oral culture, often proudly referring to the Malagasy concept of *lova-tsofina* as I explained in chapter 2.1. The importance of learning by ear is emphasised by almost all Malagasy musicians. Rajery (alias Germain Randrianarisoa) is based in Antananarivo and one of the few musicians who is internationally well known. He is also one of the few who makes a living through his music, and who has produced a number of albums that are distributed internationally. He plays the *valiha*, but also sings, mainly his own compositions, and is nowadays running his own recording studio and label “Valimad” in Antananarivo through which he also supports other Malagasy artists.<sup>56</sup> Rajery considers the “musical ear” as something given to all people. However, he sees differences in how it is used and whether people have the habit to use it. He mentions rhythm in this context, arguing that without using the “musical ear,” one will never achieve a sense of rhythm:

[1] « Chacun a leurs manières de voir des choses. En plus aussi, d’adopter et ça aussi, ça dépend aussi d’oreille. Tout dépend d’oreille évidemment. Parce que si on n’a pas d’oreille, on n’aura jamais le sens du rythme. Mais de toute façon, l’oreille musicale, c’est naturelle, tout le monde l’a ! Tout le monde a cette oreille musicale, mais c’est juste la manière de l’utiliser. Oui, l’habitude! » (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

His argument here actually mirrors a very famous debate within ethnomusicology initiated by John Blacking (1973) with his book “How musical is man?” in which he argues that all men are musical and that it is wrong to speak of ‘musical’ and ‘un-musical’ in terms of ability or talent.

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<sup>55</sup> For example: Erick Manana’s song “Vakoka” is dedicated to all the “traditional musicians” (“musiciens traditionnels”) in Madagascar he learnt with and his song “Revirevinay taloha” tells the story of a little wall in front of his friends’ house where he used to sit with his friends (with whom in the 1970s he founded the group “Lolo sy ny tariny”) and where they played their guitars, and composed new songs.

<sup>56</sup> Rajery further initiated the festival “Angaredona. Le festival des musiques vivantes à Madagascar” that had its first edition in 2004. For further information, please see <http://www.angaredona.mg/> (accessed 1.9.2010). In December 2007 I went to Mahajanga at the island’s North-West coast with Rajery where in the building of the “Alliance Française” he had organised a competition open to all local musicians, through which he then chose groups and solo musicians who were to take part in the 2008 festival in Antananarivo.

### '6/8 rhythm' meets *lova-tsofina*

Thinking about the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' as understood and used in the Western context, its consistent presence in the discourses of Malagasy musicians and the musicians' references to the Malagasy concept of *lova-tsofina* at first glance seems contradictory. A foreign concept rooted in the idea of musical notation seems to correlate with the indigenous concept or oral tradition. Rakotomavo (alias: Germain Rakotomavo) is director of a boys' highschool in Antananarivo. He plays *valiha* and guitar, though he is not performing regularly on stage, but rather plays at home or with fellow musician friends. He is very interested in research, has collected a number of books and has also asked me to send him ethnomusicological literature as it was very difficult for him to gain access to this in Madagascar. Rakotomavo argues that for him Malagasy rhythm is not measured as in Western music, but talks about an "experiential rhythm," as for him it is through experience that people master rhythm:

[2] « C'est très libre. Donc, notre rythme là, c'est pas du rythme mesuré comme dans la musique occidentale. C'est des rythmes expérimentaux. C'est à partir d'expériences qu'ils ont ce rythme là. » (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

The notion of 'experience' has already been of significance throughout my methodological and theoretical reflections discussed in section 2 and it will continue to be a central theme of this section. It appears not only within the musicians' discourses, but also becomes of crucial importance with regard to their, but also to my own, musical practices as the following chapters will show.

The presence of the term '6/8 rhythm' at first glance does not only seem to contradict the indigenous concept of *lova-tsofina*, but also the musicians' individual usages and understandings of the term bring further confusion and contradictory issues as we will see later. However, it is important and necessary to see and understand all these apparent contradictions within the particular research context.

### The importance of the research context

In section 2 I have already discussed my research context and certain aspects that need to be taken into consideration for the analysis. However, here I will point out to what extent the research context is relevant concerning the musicians' discourses on the term and

concept of '6/8 rhythm.' At first glance, it seems striking to find a Western concept and term such as the '6/8 rhythm' being commonly used in the Malagasy context. However, instead of thinking of the concept itself as 'migrating' to Madagascar, I find it more useful to take the people using this concept and the particular context they use it in as point of departure for the analysis. My aim therefore is not to find out or even judge whether the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' is suitable for Malagasy music. Rather, the questions should be: What kind of circumstances make Malagasy musicians use and/or reflect upon the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm'? And even more important: How and when do they make use of it?

In chapter 2.3 I have stressed the fact that all musicians I worked with are based in the capital Antananarivo or at least frequently work and pass by there. They all produce music that is aiming at the international world music market and all of them have made intercultural musical encounters with musicians from outside Madagascar. I have further described the role of Antananarivo as the country's cultural hub (see Kiwan and Meinhof 2011). Antananarivo's infrastructure does not only make international musical encounters possible. There are many examples of how Antananarivo distinguishes from other places on the island, for example: Everyone going to and leaving Madagascar pass through this city, languages other than Malagasy, especially French, are very important because of tourism, administration and media. There is a cultural infrastructure (even if limited, as argued earlier) with concert places and recording facilities. It is within this unique environment of Madagascar's capital and within this unique circle of musicians that the Western term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' appears and gains importance.

It happened very often that whenever I explained or mentioned my research topic or was asked about it, be it by other researchers, friends, or taxi drivers, people often warned me that I should be careful in the way that I need to consider that we are in Antananarivo and that the situation in the countryside with musicians from the countryside would be completely different. Also some of the musicians pointed this out to me during the interviews. This discourse mirrors discourses that I often encountered in tourism contexts. Speaking to tourists, but also listening to people advising tourists, the Malagasy countryside is often glorified as the 'real Madagascar,' something that also shines through in some of the musicians' ideas that I will discuss in the next chapter. The fact

that musicians pointed that out and also other examples in which they mention questions that they ask themselves or projects that they are involved in show that some of the musicians are also interested in research and that to some extent they reflect upon the research and interview situations themselves. In the last section, I have discussed in great detail my role as a researcher and to what extent my role has impacted on fieldwork situations and therefore on the research itself. This also becomes relevant when thinking about the presence of the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' in the musicians' discourses. All musicians I worked with are aware of me being a Western trained classical musician and I conducted almost all interviews in French. These two circumstances have certainly influenced the musicians in their choice of words and their way of explaining, and might have favoured the usage of the Western concept and term of '6/8 rhythm.' However, personally I never mentioned the term or concept in an interview first. For a few musicians the fact that I am a Western trained musician and that I am therefore familiar with Western music theory was also a topic that they brought up during the interviews. I will come back to this in the following analysis in which I look at the musicians' individual usage and understanding of the term and concept.

#### The term '6/8 rhythm' in the Malagasy context

The analysis of my particular research context has pointed out similarities and shared experiences of the musicians I worked with, such as living and working in the country's capital, or being involved in or at least aiming at the international 'world music market.' However, despite these shared experiences, there is no shared terminology on music (or rhythm in particular) in Madagascar, a fact that also many of the musicians mention as we will see later in this chapter. With regard to the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm,' it is therefore necessary to look into detail of how the musicians individually deal with it and use it.

#### The musicians' usage of the term: identification or taking distance?

When looking at the musicians' individual usage and understanding of the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm,' different trends emerge: some musicians identify with the term and use it without verbally reflecting upon it; others take distance from the term and

concept by identifying it as something foreign. The latter one can further be distinguished into musicians who do not use the term at all as they do not see its applicability for Malagasy music and those who use it while reflecting upon it as something imposed from the outside. There are also musicians who use the term '6/8 rhythm,' but who somehow adapt it to the Malagasy context by transforming it or giving it another meaning, for example using it in plural form as '6/8 rhythms' in order to stress the variety of rhythms as well as the common rhythmic base in Madagascar.

In the following I will analyse examples of how the musicians' individually deal with the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm.' I will explain how these examples can be distinguished into the different trends mentioned above, focussing on issues of identity, such as the musicians' perception of 'Self' and 'Other,' or their search for collective musical identity. Some musicians use the term '6/8 rhythm' without questioning its meaning or its applicability for Malagasy music. Sammy (alias Samoela Andriamalalaharijaona) is a multi-instrumentalist, singer, instrument maker, and composer from Antananarivo. He has been a member of several music groups, such as "Tarika Sammy" with which he also toured internationally and just recently has released a new CD "Tsara Madagasikara," produced by German producer Birger Gesthuisen.<sup>57</sup> Sammy describes the '6/8 rhythm' as the rhythm that unites all Malagasy music as you can find it everywhere on the island:

[3] « On a un rythme qui nous unit là. (...) Ce rythme, c'est toujours... Moi, je vois toujours le 6/8 quoi. Tu vois le (il montre). Tu trouves ça partout dans toute l'île! » (Interview Sammy, 23.11.2007)

Bilo (alias Dana Ramahaleo Bilo) is a *salegy* musician and singer, originally from the North, but nowadays based in the capital. Similarly to Sammy, Bilo regards the '6/8 rhythm' as the rhythm that unites all Malagasy music. He explains that there are differences with regard to the tempo, but that all musical styles of the different regions are in '6/8 rhythms,' using it in plural:

[4] Bilo : « Le vrai rythme en malgache c'est le 6/8. Mais il y a des 6/8 qui sont un peu lents, ça dépend des régions, qui sont un peu lents, il y a des rythmes qui sont un peu excitants qui est un peu plus rapide que l'autre. »

Jenny : « Donc c'est le tempo qui varie. »

Bilo : « Oui, c'est le tempo qui varie, mais le rythme c'est 6/8. Et c'est ça qui réunit toutes les musiques malgaches. Mais chacun a sa manière de... »

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<sup>57</sup> Samy Izy (2010): *Tsara Madagasikara*. Frankfurt am Main, Network Medien GmbH.

Jenny : « Ça veut dire que le 6/8, on le trouve vraiment partout, même au Sud... »  
 Bilo : « Même au Sud jusqu'au Nord. Tu vois, il y a le kilalaka, c'est le 6/8. Il y a aussi le hira gasy de Tananarive, c'est le 6/8. Il y a aussi le kidogo de Fianarantsoa, c'est le 6/8. Il y a aussi le salegy, le malesa du Nord. Tout ça, ce sont des 6/8. » (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

Justin Vali (alias Justin Rakotondrasoa) is another famous and internationally renowned *valiha* player who is recently very successful with his group “Ny Malagasy orchestra,” the first ‘national Malagasy orchestra’ as he calls it. The aim of this group according to Justin Vali is to fuse different Malagasy regional styles and to create music that can represent the whole country. I will come back to this group later in this chapter when I look at musicians’ discourses on marketing strategies. Justin Vali is also member of the group “Madagascar AllStars” and has produced a number of albums, both solo and with his different groups. Justin is based in France, however planning to move back to Madagascar and already spending more and more time on the island. Justin Vali also speaks of the ‘6/8 rhythm’ with regard to the musical styles of the different regions of Madagascar. Speaking about his project of “Ny Malagasy Orkestra,” he explains that the ‘6/8 rhythm’ is the base of all Malagasy music and that within this base all musicians can easily join in with their particular musical styles:

[5] «Bon, nous, notre idée, si vous avez écouté les morceaux tout à l’heure, c’est vrai que dans un morceau on a vu un petit peu de tout, mais c’est pour cela que pour moi, le rythme 6/8 ici à Madagascar, la même cadence, en fait avec la même cadence, on peut faire tout rentrer là-dedans, tous les accents de tsapiky, de salegy, de bassesa, etc. Donc, c’est ça qui est nous. C’est pour cela que tous dans un morceau, tous les musiciens de région, chaque région peuvent exprimer leur style, en fait. C’est ça. » (Interview Justin, 23.11.2007)

Sammy, Justin Vali and Bilo speak on a more general level and use the idea of the shared ‘6/8 rhythm’ to create a common musical identity. Jean-Claude (alias Jean-Claude Vinson) is a half French half Malagasy guitarist living in Antananarivo. He, in contrast, talks about the ‘6/8 rhythm’ as part of his personal experience. Like the others, he uses the term without further commenting on it and says that everything he plays immediately turns into a ‘6/8 rhythm’ as this forms part of his inspiration. He mentions foreign musical styles, such as hiphop or blues, explaining that although he is capable of playing them in the usual way, he would normally play them in a ‘6/8 rhythm.’ By this, he not



only identifies the '6/8 rhythm' as an important feature of Malagasy music, but also stresses his own "Malagasiness." This is especially interesting considering Jean-Claude being also of French origin:

[6] « Mais c'est bizarre quand j'écoute une chanson qu'elle soit pop, qu'elle soit techno, qu'elle soit hip hop, qu'elle soit blues, et si je prends toute de suite une guitare et que je rejoue la chanson, elle sort en 6/8. J'arrive plus à... Je peux la jouer en 4/4, mais c'est pas de mon inspiration. C'est pas un problème si je joue, mais je trouve plus sympa si... (Tout le monde rit.) » (Interview Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

As explained earlier, it is important to reflect upon the particular research context, including my being a Western trained musician; a fact that all the musicians I worked with are aware of. This might have influenced the musicians' choice of words and their way of explaining. This becomes evident, for example, in Jaojoby's argument. Jaojoby (alias Eusèbe Jaojoby) is probably the most famous *salegy* musician and is often called the "king of salegy."<sup>58</sup> Likewise Bilo, Jaojoby is originally from Northern Madagascar, but has been living in the island's capital for a few years and also frequently travels to Europe and Northern America for concerts.<sup>59</sup> Jaojoby represents what I have identified as another trend, i.e. musicians using the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm,' but taking distance from it at the same time. Jaojoby emphasises that it is the "theoreticians" who call the rhythm in Madagascar a '6/8 rhythm.' His understanding of a theoretician includes someone's ability to notate music. He explains that when writing down the metre of Malagasy music, it would be in a '6/8 rhythm,' emphasising the structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries.<sup>60</sup> Jaojoby also identifies me as a theoretician and although he is laughing while referring to me as one of these theoreticians, I felt that he wanted to make clear that he himself was not a theoretician. He actually confirms this later by telling me that he is not a theoretician, referring to his way of learning music through practice:

[7] « Moi, je ne suis pas théoricien, juste quelques notions de solfège quand j'étais jeune. Moi, je joue comme ça. C'est dans la pratique. Alors, je crois que c'est un peu difficile pour moi d'expliquer. » (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

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<sup>58</sup> See for example: Eyre, Banning (2002).

<sup>59</sup> On the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 2008 for example he performed at the *Olympia* concert hall in Paris. For further information on this concert, see: <http://jaojobyolympia.kantoprod.com/> (accessed 25.10.2010).

<sup>60</sup> Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008.

Furthermore, he does not speak of Malagasy music in general, but only of the music that he himself plays, namely *salegy* music:

[8] « Oui, bon écoute, déjà il y a le... Oui, la musique que je fais, le *salegy*, pour les théoriciens... comme Jenny... quand on écrit, la mesure rythmique c'est le 6/8. Ouais, mesure composée. Il semble qu'à la base c'est du carré, 1, 2, 3, 4, mais au fait c'est 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. » (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

I will come back to the discourse on *salegy* music with regard to '6/8 rhythm' later in this chapter. Hajazz (alias Haja Mbolatiana Tovo Rasolomahatratra) is an electric guitar and electric bass player, highly interested in jazz music. He also often performs with his brother Mendrika (alias Mendrika Rasolomahatratra) who is a percussionist. In Antananarivo, where he comes from and lives, he is well known for having developed a special technique of playing the electric bass and guitar that resembles *valiha* and *marovany* sounds and playing styles.

Similar to Jaojoby, Hajazz also clearly takes distance from the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm,' arguing that it is the "music teachers" and the "connoisseur musicians" who define it this way. He himself seems to juggle with terms such as 4/4 or 6/8 and says that it is not very common among Malagasy musicians to give names or definitions, indirectly referring to the concept of *lova-tsofina*:

[9] Hajazz : « En général, ce sont des profs de musique qui disent 6/8. Mais c'est un peu mélangé, on peut dire aussi même 4/4. (Il montre) 1, 2, 3, 4 (...) Ou 6/8 ou 12/8, je sais pas. C'est entre les trois. »

Jenny : « Mais, par exemple, si tu répètes avec des autres musiciens malgaches et vous parlez... si jamais ça arrive que vous parlez... »

Hajazz : « Non non, c'est rare de trouver des... des... Ce sont des musiciens connaisseurs qui disent toujours 6/8 comme ça. » (Interview Hajazz, 12.8.2008)

A conversation that I had with the three musicians Ricky, Jean-Claude and Mendrika supports Hajazz's argument that it is rare for Malagasy musicians to give musical definitions. At some point during our discussion I insisted on asking how they, between musicians, communicate about rhythm, for example during a rehearsal. When I asked, all of them burst out in laughter, explaining to me that my asking about it already reveals a difference between us. They argue that Malagasy musicians do not verbally communicate about this:

[10] Jenny : « Mais il y a quand même... Je sais pas si il y a une répétition, et vous parlez du rythme dans ce sens, est-ce que vous utilisez des mots pour... (Tout le monde rit) Ou on discute pas ? »

Ricky : « Ouais, c'est ça le problème. » (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

These three examples show how the musicians, indirectly or directly, argue that there is no agreed terminology for 'rhythm' in Madagascar. They also express a certain discomfort with the term '6/8 rhythm,' emphasising that it is a term used by others, i.e. foreigners. This attitude also shines through in their way of explaining, for example Hajazz adding "*Ou 6/8 ou 12/8, je sais pas. C'est entre les trois.*" Throughout their explanations, they draw a very clear line between *us*, the Malagasy musicians and *them*, the foreigners, including me as the researcher. The same perception can be seen in the following example which is a discussion that I had with the two musicians Bebey and Papay. Bebey (alias Mathurin Rakotomanga) is a singer and member of the legendary group "Lolo sy ny tariny" that I already mentioned in chapter 2.3. Papay (alias Papay Raveloarisy) is a farmer, living outside the capital and a rock musician, singing and playing bass guitar. He has his own rock band called "Iraimbilanja" (meaning "One Franc") and had also founded the group "Sivy Mahasaky" ("The nine who dare") which does not exist anymore. I will come back to this group and Papay's ambition and idea behind it later in this chapter. In the discussion that I had with Bebey and Papay, it is especially me who they exclude from the shared experience that all Malagasy musicians have with regard to rhythm. In contrast to the examples above, they use the term '6/8 rhythm' without identifying it immediately as something foreign. However, by using and juggling with different terms, such as 'rhythm,' 'accents,' or 'tempo,' they point out a general terminological confusion:

[11] Bebey : « Mais le rythme qu'on dit chaque fois que c'est le 6/8 ça étonne Jenny quand on (il tape le pied), quand on fait la rythmique. »

Jenny : « Par exemple j'ai filmé beaucoup des pieds pendant des concerts, si c'est un public vazaha/malgache et tu regardes les pieds, c'est jamais pareil. »

Bebey : « Jamais ! C'est jamais pareil. Nous, on a notre truc. Et en fait, nous, on a tout le temps des accents sur le 6/8. En fait c'est ce que... elle, elle cherche ça. Et moi, je lui dis "Tu peux pas faire ça, Jenny" (tout le monde rit) "Parce que c'est malgache et c'est un esprit en fait". Et là, elle me tire la langue quand je dis ça. Mais en fait, ça doit être vrai dans quelque part, même Radonné, Donné, on lui a expliqué ça. Et on a appelé l'autre là... »

Jenny : « Fanaiky. »

Bebey : « Fanaiky. Il était là, donc moi, j'ai dit "Fanaiky, viens ici, fais-moi du 6/8". Et lui était là et Jenny aussi... on a... en fait Donné, Fanaiky et moi, quand on fait le 6/8, on a toujours le même... »

Papay : « Tempo. »

Bebey : « ... Accent. En fait, c'est des accents, parce que... »

Jenny : « Non, je crois que, si j'ai bien compris, en fait je crois que c'est pas le 6/8, mais on l'appelle 6/8. »

Bebey : « Nous, on appelle ça 6/8, mais en fait c'est pas du 6/8 en fait. »

Papay : « C'est vraiment bizarre aussi le tempo et puis la façon de compter. »

(Interview Papay and Bebey, 21.7.2008)

The discussion with Bebey and Papay is also another example for many of the musicians' own engagement in the research or their perception of themselves as researchers to a certain extent. Many of the musicians have told me that they really see a need for the research I am doing as they need to be able to explain their music as well as foreigners need to be able to understand Malagasy music – a topic that I will come back to later in this chapter when talking about the '6/8 rhythm' with regard to marketing strategies and the musicians' own experiences with this. This researching aspect often appears within the musicians' discourses, enforced by the absence of a shared indigenous terminology as well as a certain discomfort with the foreign term and concept that some musicians express. Rajery, for example, explains that he is still not sure how to technically define what he calls the "Malagasy rhythmic symbiosis." He expresses a certain need to find an answer to this as well as the discomfort he feels when using these technical terms, such as '6/8' or '12/8 rhythm':

[12] « La symbiose rythmique malgache ! Moi, je pose aussi la question, pour le moment, est-ce que c'est le 6/8 ou le 12/8 ? Donc, nous, on continue, quelle est la différence exactement et quelle est la particularité du 12/8 malgache par rapport au 12/8 européen ? Quelle est la particularité de 12/8 malgache au rapport aux africains ? Donc, c'est toute une recherche. Ça se dit pas comme ça ! Moi, je pense, donc, je fais attention à tout ce que je dis, parce que c'est vraiment, c'est très très musical, très technique. Donc, il faut faire attention (il rit). On peut pas dire, c'est comme ça le rythme malgache. On peut pas dire ça, parce que des fois ça varie d'une région à l'autre. » (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

### Terminological confusion

All examples that I have analysed do not only show how the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' is used in many different ways by the musicians, but also how their different usage and understanding leads to even more terminological confusion. This implies not only confusion around the specific term and concept of '6/8 rhythm,' but also on 'rhythm' or other terms related to music. I will demonstrate this argument in more detail with the following example.

### Example *salegy*

*Salegy* music is one of the Malagasy musical styles most represented on the international music market. As mentioned above, the best-known representative of it is probably Jaojoby. As music journalist Banning Eyre writes in his article on *salegy* music in the *fruits* magazine, Jaojoby already performed his first shows in Paris in 1989. His album "*Salegy!*," produced by Ben Mandelson for the label "Rogue," was recorded in Madagascar in 1992. It was first released in Europe and later licensed to "Xenophile" in the US (Eyre 2002: 41). At the beginning of his article, Eyre describes *salegy* music as follows:

"Salegy is rowdy, 6/8, electric pop music from Madagascar's north east coast, far from the hubbub of Tana, (...). These days, salegy has more or less arrived as the national dance-pop music" (Eyre 2002: 40).

This short extract includes already some of the confusing aspects and contentious issues within the musicians' discourses on *salegy* that I will analyse: 1. Eyre describes *salegy* as a '6/8 rhythm.' The majority of the musicians agree with this and use the term themselves. However, there is also confusion on the level that *salegy* is often even used as a synonym for '6/8 rhythm' by some musicians. 2. Eyre further describes *salegy* as a musical style. Within the discourses of the musicians, the term *salegy* is also used differently and more specific, for example for a dance or a rhythm. 3. Eyre writes on the one hand that *salegy* is related to the Northern region of Madagascar, on the other hand he describes its role as the national dance-pop music. To what extent *salegy* represents Madagascar on a national level is another controversial issue discussed by the musicians. This also relates to the origin, history and development of *salegy*.

Jaojoby explains that the word *salegy* did not exist until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When thinking of *salegy*, he argues, one need to think of “Malagasy folklore in a 6/8 metre that is accompanied by instruments coming from the Occident.” Based on this definition, he explains that it was with the arrival of the accordion in Madagascar that *salegy* turned into what it is nowadays. The origin of *salegy* can be found in traditional songs across the island, also in 6/8 metre, that before still had names that referred to the different regions and ethnic groups:

[13] « On n’a pas parlé du mot *salegy* avant le 19<sup>ième</sup> siècle. Quand on parle *salegy*, il faut avoir dans la tête : folklore malgache, à la mesure 6/8, accompagné par des instruments venus de l’Occident. On a commencé de parler du mot *salegy* dans le 19<sup>ième</sup> siècle quand l’accordéon était arrivé ici. Moi, je n’étais pas là. Donc, quand le musicien malgache là, il joue de l’accordéon, il a essayé de jouer son folklore avec et là le mot *salegy* est né. Parce qu’avant l’arrivée de l’accordéon... eh ben, les Malgaches, ils jouaient a capella. Ils battaient des mains ou il y avait des tambours, cithare tubulaire là, valiha, à l’époque on ne parlait pas encore du *salegy*. On avait l’habitude de dire “chant Sakalava” ou bien “osiky Tsimihety”, “hira Betsimisaraka” ou “hira Merina”. On appelait comme ça. Mais depuis l’accordéon est venu dans le 19<sup>ième</sup> siècle donc, on a commencé à entendre le mot *salegy*. » (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

In an interview that Bernard Terramorsi and Elie Rajaonarison conducted with Jaojoby in 1999,<sup>61</sup> he explains that there are also traditional songs that are in a 4/4 metre. He uses *salegy* as a synonym for ‘6/8 rhythm’ by saying that here he is talking about *salegy* only (and not about 4/4 metre). He further explains that in other regions, the word *salegy* is not used and the music is called differently, even if it is exactly the same:

[14] « Il y a aussi d’autres rythmes traditionnels, d’autres chants traditionnels à mesure 4/4 par exemple. Mais là, nous parlons de *salegy*. Par exemple à l’Est, ils l’appellent bassesa, mais c’est la même chose bien sûr. Dans le Sud, ils ne l’appellent pas *salegy*, et pourtant les Vezo de Tuléar, les Antandroy, ils jouent de la musique pareille à celle des ancêtres du *salegy*, avec le marovany, valiha, accordéon. Ils appellent ça jihé. C’est la même chose. » (Jaojoby, quoted in Terramorsi and Rajaonarison 2004: 173)

In the interview with me he describes *salegy* specifically as a rhythm that is played everywhere in Madagascar. He even goes so far as to call *salegy* the “federal rhythm of all Malagasy people.” His argument is that all Malagasy know how to play *salegy*. At the

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<sup>61</sup> The interview was conducted in 1999 in Antananarivo and published in 2004 (Terramorsi and Rajaonarison 2004).

same time, he also says that it is right to claim that *salegy* has its origin in Madagascar's North. For him, *salegy* seems to be both: regional as well as national:

[15] Jaojoby : « Oui, oui, puisque... je m'excuse... puisque le *salegy* est vraiment le rythme fédérateur de tous les Malgaches. Tous les Malgaches savent jouer du *salegy*. »

Jenny : « Et tous les Malgaches appellent ça *salegy* ? »

Jaojoby : « Pas forcément. Mais quand on dit que le *salegy* ça vient du Nord, c'est aussi vrai ! » (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

Bilo agrees with him on the special role that *salegy* holds within Madagascar. He sees *salegy* as the most successful music in Madagascar as it has spread all across the island:

[16] « Oui oui, c'est le *salegy* qui a voyagé partout à Madagascar, parce que maintenant c'est une musique roi à Madagascar, maintenant sur notre temps, c'est une musique roi à Madagascar. » (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

Sammy in contrast regards *salegy* as something regional from the North. However, although he does not use the word *salegy* in the context of the other regions, he nevertheless explains that the rhythm is everywhere the same and that only the name for it changes:

[17] « Non, tu sais, le *salegy*, ça... ça vient d'une région, c'est vrai. Par exemple si tu parles de Mahajanga, le *salegy* ça vient du Nord quoi. Mais dans le Sud on s'appelle ça *tsapiky*. C'est la même chose ! Tu vois ? Si tu prends le (il montre), tu vois, c'est la même chose ! Tu comprends ce que je veux dire ? Tu prends les Hauts Plateaux, il y a une chose qu'on appelle le *vakisaova*. Le *vakisaova* c'est à peu près avec le clap de main, il fait (il montre). C'est toujours comme ça. » (Interview Sammy, 23.11.2007)

At first glance Rajery seems to agree that every region has a similar rhythm, namely a type of '6/8 rhythm.' Talking about one of his current musical projects, he says that he is working with the musical style called "*vakodrazana*," "the 6/8 of the High Plateaux" as he calls it. Whereas he first emphasises that *vakodrazana* is not *salegy*, only a bit later he also calls it the "*salegy* of the High Plateaux," using *salegy* as a synonym for '6/8 rhythm':

[18] « Donc, là, avec le style là, j'ai exploité un peu le style de *vakodrazana* des Hauts Plateaux. Ça veut dire, c'est à peu près le 6/8 des Hauts Plateaux, c'est pas le *salegy*... (...) Mais, ça c'est vraiment du 6/8 des Hauts Plateaux, du *salegy* des Hauts Plateaux en quelque sorte. Parce que chaque région a leur style de *salegy*. » (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

In another moment, Rajery argues that *salegy* is not a genre of music, but rather a way of dancing. He explains that understood from a historical perspective, the genre should be called “*antsa*” and “*salegy*” is the way of dancing to it:

[19] « En fait, ça dépend, déjà, le *salegy*, c’est pas du genre de musique. L’*antsa*, c’est ça le genre de musique. Le *salegy*, c’est une manière de danser, en général. Historiquement, c’est comme ça. » (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

According to Rajery, *antsa* is a musical genre which has its origin in the North West of Madagascar where the *Sakalava* people live. It implies singing and hand clapping and up to three accompanying instruments, such as the *kabosy*.<sup>62</sup> A characteristic of this genre is the call and response singing. Rajery further talks about an evolution that took place when people started to use the musical genre of *antsa* to animate for dancing: it was then that drum kits and electronic instruments were added and that *salegy* as a dancing style was born.<sup>63</sup>

This is completely contrary to what Bilo says. He argues that *salegy* signifies the rhythm and that there is a special dance that goes with it which is called *kawitchi*. At the same time he explains that although *salegy* is first of all the rhythm, it includes many different things at the same time:

[20] « Il y a la musique *salegy*, bon. Si tu écoutes une musique *salegy* qui est là et tu veux danser, donc, tu dances le *kawitchi*. C’est la façon de danser le *salegy*. Donc, le nom de la danse c’est *kawitchi* (...) Mais le *salegy*, ça reste un rythme, mais dans le *salegy* là, il y a beaucoup des choses. » (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

In another moment of the interview Bilo says that in general *salegy* is a song, a traditional song from the North of Madagascar. At the same time, he argues, that many things form part of *salegy*, and that *salegy* is first of all dancing and singing:

[21] « En fait... le *salegy* en général c’est une chanson. C’est une chanson traditionnelle du Nord de Madagascar. Donc, dans le *salegy*, il y a beaucoup des choses. Le *salegy* veut dire, façon de parler, façon de vivre. La façon de vivre. On vit dans le *salegy*. Donc, en tant que chanson, il y a des chants, des chants traditionnels, il y a des percussions, il y a de la danse, la danse surtout. Donc, chanter et danser, c’est le *salegy*. » (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

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<sup>62</sup> The *kabosy* is a Malagasy long-necked lute. For more information on the instrument, see Schmidhofer, August and Michel Domenichini-Ramiaramanana: *Madagascar*. In: *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/44733> (accessed 2.11. 2010).

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Rajery, 17.12.2007.



When I told him that I was often slightly confused by the different ways people use the term *salegy*, he assured me again that *salegy* was only the name of the rhythm:

[22] Bilo : « Oui, les gens utilisent ça dans des sens différents, parce que quand on dit *salegy*, c'est seulement le rythme. Tu vois ? »

Jenny : « C'est le nom du rythme ? »

Bilo : « Le nom du rythme. » (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

In the same way that I am not aiming at finding out or judging whether the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' suits the Malagasy context, my aim is not to find the right definition for *salegy*. The analysis above of the musicians' discourse on *salegy* shows that the word is used in numerous ways. Musicians also often use it in different, to some extent contradictory ways and slightly change the usage, depending on the context in which they are talking about it or depending on the question that they have been asked. It also shows, once more, the presence of the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' within the musicians' discourses and their search for musical identity. There is no shared understanding and usage of *salegy* among the musicians and the terminological confusion around the term confirms the general terminological confusion on musical terms, such as 'rhythm.' Musicians, like Bilo and Jaobjoby, who are known as *salegy* musicians and who are fairly successful in the music market with it, tend to emphasise the representative role of *salegy* as a national music style. To them, *salegy* seems to integrate both usages: the potential of musically representing Madagascar and at the same time, some kind of regional pride. But other musicians, such as Rajery who is himself from the High Plateaux region, say that every region has its style of *salegy*, using it as a synonym for '6/8 rhythm.' Others again do not identify with *salegy* in that way and do not use it on a general level, but rather mention it as one of many regional musical styles. Everyone agrees about the origin of *salegy* within the North of the island. However, musicians feel different towards the role of *salegy* within the country's music scene. The musicians' discourse on *salegy* therefore becomes highly interesting with regard to identity issues as two major trends seem to be inherent: the longing to find a common musical identity as well as keeping and pointing at the musical diversity of the different regions of the island. As one of the shared elements of the musicians I worked with, I have identified their aim of gaining access and becoming successful on the international so-called 'world music market.' Their discourses on the '6/8 rhythm' here also come into play as 'rhythm' seems

to be of great significance for the musicians' individual experiences and ideas concerning marketing strategies.

The challenge of the international 'world music market' – musicians' individual experiences: perspectives and strategies

According to Stoke (2004), with the coining of the term 'world music' in the 1980s a complex discourse has emerged that was primarily intended

“(...) to energize and enthuse compact disk (CD) buyers, and is living its own unruly life in music journalism (...) and on the fringes of academia in conferences, artist-in-residence programs, concert tours, workshops, and academic publications” (Stoke 2004: 52).

Exactly because of this complexity in which “the global dimensions of the local product” are also often understood in different ways by different actors, such as record companies, studio technicians, or musicians (Stoke 2004: 53), many scholars have particularly focused on the analysis of discourses on 'world music' (e.g. Taylor 1997, Frith 2000, Théberge 2003). Stoke (2004) for example argues that many musicians who have been labelled as “world music artists” actually have difficulties with or do not even accept this definition for themselves (Stoke 2004: 52) – an experience also shared by some of the Malagasy musicians as I have stressed in chapter 2.1.

It is beyond the scope of my thesis to go into detail on studies of 'world music' discourses.<sup>64</sup> Here, I would only like to point at a few aspects within scholarly discussions and debates that are relevant to the Malagasy musicians' individual experiences that I will present below and to others presented in the following chapters of section 3. What scholars identify as key notions within the discourses on 'world music' – “authenticity, roots, hybridity, and the local” (Stoke 2004: 59; see also Taylor 1997) – also appear in the musicians' individual perspectives on how to best access the international market. Whereas the notions of 'authenticity' and 'hybridity' at first glance seem to be opponents, the situation, especially from a discursive point of view, is much

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<sup>64</sup> For further reading on this topic see Taylor 1997, Frith 2000, Bohlman 2002, Théberge 2003 and Stoke 2004.

more complex and both terms are often entangled (Stoke 2004: 59).<sup>65</sup> This also becomes evident when looking at the musicians' individual experiences.

All musicians agree that Malagasy music has not yet been really successful on the international music market. However, their opinions as to why this is the case and also how this could be changed are very different. Again, 'rhythm' seems to play a crucial role in the musicians' ideas and suggestions. The absence of proper international success for Malagasy music is a topic that regularly comes up and musicians very much reflect upon the reasons for it. Here, the research context is important as well. As already discussed in the methodology chapter, some musicians have probably seen in me a potential helper in accessing the Western music market, a fact that I will also take into consideration in my analysis of the musicians' discourses on this particular topic. Two major trends appear within the musicians' discourses. 1. The majority of the musicians still see an obstacle in the fact that they are not able to properly explain their music to a foreign audience. They argue that Malagasy music would be much more successful and appreciated internationally once it becomes more accessible and understandable for foreign audiences. Many of these musicians often expressed their thanks to me as they see my research as a support for their aims. 2. In contrast, other musicians think that it is actually an asset for the marketing of Malagasy music that it is difficult for foreigners to understand and play the music. They argue that it creates curiosity and some sort of exoticism. In both cases, 'rhythm' seems to be the central theme. Whereas in the first trend musicians describe 'rhythm' as the element that needs to be properly explained and made accessible to the outside world, others see an advantage in the confusion that it creates. Another important argument and contentious issue which goes in hand with these two major trends concerns the actual musical sound and the musical arrangements and compositions. Whereas some musicians argue that it is important to musically open up to the foreign world and integrate non-Malagasy musical elements or styles to approach foreign audiences and create an interest in Malagasy music, others argue that it is more important to make Malagasy music as pure as possible. In the following I will analyse some of the musicians' arguments in more detail. Again, I

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<sup>65</sup> Frith (2000) even goes so far as to say that in world music circles hybridity is "the new authenticity" (Frith 2000: 312).

will also focus on identity issues, such as the musicians' perceptions of 'Self' and 'Other' in this context.

Most musicians see a great marketing potential in Malagasy rhythm and at the same time the need to make it accessible and understandable to the international public. Sammy, for example, highlights the importance that rhythm needs to make people dance. He draws the comparison to the music of African stars, such as Baaba Maal, and says that he tries to change the Malagasy rhythm in the way these musicians do in order to make his own music danceable as well:

[23] « Mais là, on a changé un peu le rythme des fois comme Youssour N'Dour, Baaba Maal et les autres là qu'on arrive à danser avec. Mais si tu écoutes vraiment comment ils font, (il rit) waouh ! C'est dur ! Et là, dans la musique malgache, moi je fais ça aussi. J'essaie de le trouver. » (Interview Sammy, 23.11.2007)

The comparison to African music stars is interesting considering that especially in the High Plateaux region where most of the musicians, including Sammy, come from, people tend to emphasise that they are not African, but Malagasy. I have mentioned this conflict between the High Plateaux people and the *Côtiers* already in chapter 2.1. For Sammy, the challenges of the international music market actually seem to create a certain collective African identity among musicians.

The relation of Malagasy music with African music is also an issue that comes up in the following examples. Jean-Claude and Ricky compare the rhythm in Madagascar with a precious stone that has not yet been polished so that it can be appreciated and becomes attractive on the market. Two arguments shine through in this metaphor. 1. They see an immense potential in Malagasy music and rhythm in particular that has not yet been properly utilised. 2. A certain adaptation of Malagasy music is necessary in order to spark interest in Malagasy music:

[24] Ricky: « (...) c'est quoi l'histoire du rythme à Madagascar. Peut-être c'est à cause de ça qu'on est bloqué par rapport aux Maliens, aux Sénégalais, aux Brésiliens... »

Jean-Claude : « C'est peut-être ça effectivement que... une fois on m'a demandé, mais pourquoi la musique malgache a du mal à sortir ? Parce qu'elle trop riche mais attends, qu'est-ce que tu racontes, elle est trop riche ? » (Tout le monde rit.)

Ricky : « C'est peut-être ça. »

Jean-Claude : « Tu vois, tu prends une pierre précieuse dans la terre, il y en a beaucoup ici à Madagascar. Exemple, prends une pierre, il y a plein de bouts, c'est cassé de partout, il y a des trucs, mais c'est une pierre précieuse. C'est un peu comme le cas de l'émeraude de 550 kilos qui est sortie de Madagascar. Une pierre précieuse. Alors, on va au marché, on trouve des gens qui achètent des bijoux et ils, eux ils voient ça, oh la la, il y a pleins de bouts, c'est mal foutu, j'achète pas. Alors que là on peut faire des milliers bijoux. Alors, la musique malgache elle est comme ça. Le rythme malgache. Il faut la prendre et puis la tailler pour que les gens puissent la prendre. » (Interview Ricky and Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

Whereas here, Jean-Claude clearly draws a distinction between Malagasy and African music, describing it even as a sort of competition, he later considers Malagasy rhythm an African rhythm, although with some hesitation. He explains that he thinks that Europeans have not yet understood that rhythm is the most important element in African and Malagasy music. He concludes that if African rhythm or Malagasy rhythm had as beautiful melodies as for example the Beatles, it would be much more successful:

[25] « Parce que pour l'instant en Europe peut-être on n'a pas encore compris ça. Mais une fois ça va.... Le rythme en Afrique c'est ce qui est le plus important, c'est très très riche. Si le rythme africain, malgache... bon, c'est africain, avait des mélodies aussi belles que les Beatles et les autres... c'est ici que ça va se passer la musique. C'est simplement la mélodie à mettre sur ce rythme. Et voilà... tout est ouvert. » (Interview Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

Papay has a similar idea of the need to adapt Malagasy music to a certain extent for an international audience. In the 1990s he had initiated the group called “Sivy Mahasaky” (“the nine who dare”), bringing together three jazz musicians, three rock musicians and three *mpihira gasy* (Malagasy term for musician playing in the *hira gasy*). Papay explains that despite the group's success within Madagascar, it did not exist for very long as there was not sufficient financial support. The initial idea of the group was to fuse different musical styles and through this add something to Malagasy music that would give the music a more powerful sound. In contrast to most other musician, Papay speaks of “the monotony” of Malagasy rhythm and regards it as an obstacle and as something that needs to be changed in order to make the music more successful:

[26] Papay : « J'ai imaginé pourquoi la musique malgache ça n'arrive jamais à percer... »

Jenny : « Sortir vraiment ? »

Papay : « De faire du showbiz vraiment coûteux quoi. Peut-être c'est à cause de cette monotonie, parce que des gens, il y a des gens qui aiment le côté de la bonne mélodie. Et il y a des gens qui aiment bien... comment ça... des chorus ou bien c'est comme ça. Et peut-être à cause de cette monotonie (...) J'ai espéré avant avec Sivy Mahasaky... J'ai entendu beaucoup de musique malgache et ça m'a beaucoup plu. Mais ce que j'ai remarqué c'est que il manque du punch. Ça veut dire que les vakisaova et le hira gasy font... »

Bebey : « Voilà, cette pêche ! C'est vrai ce qu'il dit ! »

Papay : « Et c'est pour cela que j'ai essayé de regrouper ces gens de hira gasy, les vakodrazana, bon parce qu'il y a des gens qui font la musique malgache à leur façon, c'est pas mal. Mais ce qu'ils leur manquent, c'est la pêche quoi ! »

(Interview Papay and Bebey, 21.7.2008)

Bebey, who was present and also participated in my interview with Papay knows the group “Sivy Mahasaky” and has heard them playing at the time. He sees a great marketing potential in such a group, exactly because of their approach to fuse Malagasy music with musical styles, such as jazz and rock. He argues that people would immediately get something out of this music and understand something as the music has something “of theirs” as well:

[27] « En fait c'est ça qui doit se vendre en plus et ça c'était une bonne idée. Ça, ça doit être... Tu sais, quand les gens vont regarder ça dans un festival en Allemagne, ils vont comprendre quelque chose. Ils sont pas... ils font pas cet effort de comprendre. Ils vont tout de suite comprendre, parce qu'il y a un peu de “leurs” dans le truc. » (Interview Papay and Bebey, 21.7.2008)

A similar idea has been the inspiration of one of Erick Manana's current musical projects in which I have also participated as a violinist and to which I will come back in chapter 3.3. By arranging standard jazz tunes, such as Louis Armstrong's “All of me,” in a Malagasy version, he is hoping to spark interest and curiosity in Malagasy music. He argues that whereas the Malagasy rhythm is added and becomes the basis for the song, it still appeals to a wider public as there is something well-known within the music at the same time.<sup>66</sup>

In contrast to the last examples, Jaobjoby does not see any need to adapt Malagasy music or make it more accessible and attractive for an international audience. Rather, he advises all Malagasy musicians to make as pure Malagasy music as possible as this is what is expected and appreciated:

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<sup>66</sup> Discussion with Erick Manana, 20.12.2009.

[28] « D'ailleurs, je conseille toujours ceci à mes collègues malgaches : “si vous voulez percer, il faut faire gasy-gasy, malgacho-malgache“, parce que c'est ce que le reste du monde aime, c'est ça qu'il attend des artistes malgaches. » (Jaojoby, cited in Terramorsi and Rajaonarison 2004: 185)

When he was specifically asked about what he advised younger musicians in Antananarivo who are dreaming of going to Europe, he also emphasised the importance of making one's own music, i.e. Malagasy music:

[29] « Eh bien, je leur ai toujours conseillé : “Faites la musique malagasy, faites-la bien, ça sera votre passeport, votre billet d'avion.” » (Jaojoby, cited in Terramorsi and Rajaonarison 2004: 187)

This was already true for him in the 1970s in Madagascar. In an interview with *froots* journalist Banning Eyre, Jaojoby recalls how at the time he had performed with his group “Players” and how they had adopted other African rhythms into Malagasy rhythms:

“We made more African and Malagasy rhythms: kwassa-kwassa, sigoma, and also rhythms from the Indian Ocean, like sega. We played most of the African rhythms, but we made them Malagasy” (Jaojoby, cited in: Eyre 2002: 41).

The accordionist and singer Médicis (alias Jean Maryse Rabesiraka) died in a violent robbery in Antananarivo in March this year. He had assisted a concert given by the French group “Shoppings” and on his way home was attacked by bandits.<sup>67</sup> Many musicians I spoke to blame the enduring political crisis for this tragic event as the criminality rate has increased enormously since the beginning of 2009. Some musicians have also expressed their worries about performing late at night or being paid right after the concert. Personally, I have only had the chance to meet Médicis once for an interview. In our discussion he told me that he saw no need in adapting Malagasy music in any way, but rather that he regarded rhythm as the means through which he could communicate even to a foreign audience that could not understand his lyrics in Malagasy.<sup>68</sup>

Jazz saxophone player Seta (alias Seta Ramaroson), one of the few musicians reading and writing music who is also giving music classes and teaches musical notation in

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<sup>67</sup> For an obituary of Médicis, see for example <http://mondomix.com/blogs/accordeon.php/2010/03/28/medicis-madagascar-disparition-d-un-merv> (accessed 2.9.2010).

<sup>68</sup> Interview Médicis, 19.8.2008.

Antananarivo, is convinced that transcription is the way to make Malagasy music approachable and accessible to foreign people. He gives the example of Salsa music which has become particularly popular through different means: there are Salsa dancing classes and Salsa parties everywhere and people can, for example, buy written Salsa music books and music scores in shops. As Seta puts it, Salsa music has become reproducible and approachable to foreign people.<sup>69</sup>

Seta's idea that transcription holds the key for international success becomes especially interesting with regard to the musicians' emphasis on the *lova-tsofina* that will be the focus of the next chapter in which I will analyse the musicians' own theories and ideas about the origin and meaning of 'rhythm' in Madagascar. As I have followed the *lova-tsofina* myself, I will also come back to the issue of transcribing music in the last chapter of this section. There, I will also analyse my own experiences with 'rhythm' that I gained through both, the analysis of discourses and of musical practices, and will explain how these experiences relate to the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm.'

### Conclusion

The topic of this first chapter of section 3 has been the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm.' Section 3 comprises three analyses chapters, the first two focussing on the analysis of the musicians' discourses and the last chapter highlighting the importance of the integration of musical practices. I have begun this chapter by giving a brief insight into scholarly debates on language and identity as the presence of this Western concept rooted in the idea of musical notation within the musicians' discourses raises questions and at first glance seems contradictory, especially as the musicians emphasise so much the importance of oral tradition and the concept of *lova-tsofina* for Malagasy music. However, I have argued that instead of studying seemingly contradictory discourses and trying to 'judge' what seems right and wrong, it is useful to look at when and how and in what kind of circumstances musicians' exactly make use of this concept. Therefore, I have looked at the particular research context and have given examples of circumstances that have definitely influenced the usage of this foreign term and concept, such as the musicians' bond to the capital Antananarivo with its role as a 'cultural hub' and its

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<sup>69</sup> Interview Seta, 22.7.2008.



cultural infrastructure (see also chapter 2.3), the musicians' aim to reach the international world music market, or the usage of the language French – all of these aspects being interrelated and interdependent.

The usage and understanding of the term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' is however different among the musicians and contestation and terminological confusion occurs. I have therefore analysed the musicians' individual usage and understanding, looking at different aspects for which the '6/8 rhythm' seems to play a significant role for the musicians: Whereas some musicians use the term without further reflecting upon it, others use it, but call it a foreign concept and often declare its inappropriateness for Malagasy music. Some argue that it is non-Malagasy people, especially 'music theorists' who use this concept to describe Malagasy rhythm. These two trends – on the one hand the identification with the term and concept, and on the other hand taking a distance from it – clearly point at the terminological confusion around the '6/8 rhythm,' but also generally on 'rhythm' and musical terminology within the musicians' discourses. This also becomes clear in my example of the discourses on *salegy* music with regard to the '6/8 rhythm': e.g. there is discordance among the musicians whether *salegy* defines a musical style, a dance, or a rhythm. Further, whereas some musicians use the word *salegy* as a synonym for '6/8 rhythm,' often seeing the *salegy's* importance on a national level, others emphasise its regional bond to the North-East of Madagascar.

The term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' furthermore plays a significant role in the musicians' discourses on their strategies and attempts to reach the international world music market. Again, musicians' opinions and experiences vary, with two major trends coming to the fore: Some musicians see a need to improve their ability to explain their music to foreign audiences. Here, many also argue that it is useful to integrate foreign musical elements into their music so that it becomes easier for non-Malagasy people to understand and identify with the music. Others, in contrast, see a high potential in the confusion that rhythm creates in Malagasy music. They say that playing the music "as Malagasy as possible" would make it more interesting and exotic for foreign listeners. The next chapter will focus on the seeming counterpart of the '6/8 rhythm,' namely the musicians' experiences of the *lova-tsofina* that shine through in their discourses on the origin and meaning of 'rhythm' in Madagascar.

### **Chapter 3.2 - Exploring the *lova-tsofina*: Musician's theories on the origin and meaning of 'rhythm' in Malagasy music**

- Introduction
- The importance of listening to the musicians' own concepts
- The topoi
  - Environment
  - Everyday life
  - Language
  - Dance
  - Influences from outside
  - Emotions and spiritual ideas
- Conclusion

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I will continue to analyse the musicians' discourses, here particularly focussing on the musicians' experiences that relate to the *lova-tsofina*. I will look at the diverse discourses of the Malagasy musicians on the origin and meaning of 'rhythm' in their country's music. 'Rhythm' is explained, understood, and experienced in many ways that touch upon different 'topoi,' such as the country's environment or Malagasy everyday life. All of these topoi are interrelated and almost all of them are also deeply rooted within Madagascar itself. References concerning the meaning of 'rhythm' or its origin always point at the 'land of the ancestors' and only very rarely at influences from outside the island.

Following on from the previous chapter, this chapter equally investigates how identity is constructed through the musicians' discourses about the meaning and origin of 'rhythm' in Madagascar. How and through what kind of images or metaphors do the musicians create their ideas of what is typically 'Malagasy'? What kind of characteristics and

symbols do they use to depict their nation or their own communities, even if it is an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) of some sort?

The analysis of the musicians’ discourses will show that ideas of being alike and unlike as well as the general debate on sameness and difference appear as persistent topics. However, there are different levels on which this is expressed, such as for example Madagascar vs. the Western world, High Plateaux region vs. coastal regions, or Madagascar vs. African mainland.

#### The importance of listening to the musicians’ own concepts

In the last section, I have argued for the importance of listening to the musicians’ own concepts and ideas about music and musicking, also with regard to Agawu’s “*presumption of sameness*” (Agawu 2003). I have further already mentioned the musicians’ emphasis on the importance of oral tradition for Malagasy music making to which they refer to as the *lova-tsofina*. The discourses about the origin and meaning of ‘rhythm’ analysed in the following all relate to and further explore the *lova-tsofina*. Even if the term and concept of ‘6/8 rhythm’ appears in the discourses analysed below, in this chapter I will not focus on whether this particular term is used or not by the individual musicians. However, some arguments highlighted in the previous chapter are important to bear in mind for the analyses of the discourses in this chapter, such as the importance of the particular research context, my double role as a researcher and a (Western trained) musician, or the musicians’ aim to reach the international ‘world music market.’ The discourses analysed here and those analysed in the previous chapter will become of crucial importance in the next chapter in which I will focus on musical experiences, those of the musicians and my own. I will refer back to many aspects, topoi, and experiences mentioned in my analyses of the discourses. Therefore, the analyses presented in the three different chapters should not be understood as being in any chronological order with regard to how I conducted my research.

#### The topoi

In order to investigate the different ways in which the musicians conceptualise the origin and meaning of ‘rhythm,’ I have searched for ‘recurring topoi’ that appear in their

discourses. The division into different ‘fields’ may seem artificial at some points since, as my examples will show, all the topoi are interrelated. However, in order to systematise and gain a better overview of the enormous range of perspectives and the constant debate on unity and diversity or sameness and difference, I find it useful to present my analysis within a framework of subject areas.

There are two dominant topoi within the musicians’ discourses on the origin and meaning of ‘rhythm.’ The first one is the environment, bringing up various aspects, such as the actual physical or geographical environment on the island, the peoples’ orientation and movements within the environment, or their association with and sensibility towards the environment. This includes their treatments of/relationship with animals, especially towards the all important zebu cows which play a central role in Malagasy culture. This topos of the environment is closely related to another very prominent theme, namely that of Malagasy everyday life and everyday activities, such as for instance working, eating, or walking. Activities, such as speaking and singing, again link up with the important topos of the Malagasy language. Many musicians see a close relation between different aspects of the country’s language and ‘rhythm.’ Musicians also express ideas about movement/moving, often related to dance. Aspects which are mentioned within this theme are the styles of dancing, its developments as well as inspirations for choreographies. Yet another topos is that of emotions and spiritual ideas that some musicians have towards ‘rhythm.’ It embraces the probably most personal views and feelings of some of the musicians. As mentioned above, almost all the musicians’ ideas are rooted in Malagasy culture and within the borders of the island. There are, however, a few musicians who mention influences from outside, especially as regards the origin or history of the ‘Malagasy rhythm.’

The concept of ‘rhythm’ is highly contested as we have seen in the theoretical discussion in chapter 2.1, in the musicians’ discourses analysed in the previous chapter, and as we will also further see in the discussions among the musicians discussed below. I will primarily analyse the musicians’ perspectives on the origin and meaning of ‘rhythm.’ However, as a strictly defined concept of ‘rhythm’ is not agreed on, I will also include

broader ideas and reflections concerning for instance music in general or musical instruments.

### Environment

Considering the vast body of literature on Madagascar's nature and various discourses glorifying the island's flora and fauna, such as in tourism adverts or TV documentaries, it might not be completely surprising that the environment has turned out to be so important within the musicians' discourses. Environmental topics also often appear in the musicians' self-presentation on stage. The need for environmental awareness is a topic that musicians talk about when they present their country of origin and their music to foreign audiences as the example of the "*Voajanahary*" project by Dama Mahaleo and Ricky given in chapter 2.1 shows. With regard to 'rhythm,' it is striking to see what a broad range of aspects of the environment the musicians reflect upon. They talk about the geographical environment, as it appears in landscape or climate; they mention people's attitudes and sensibility towards the environment, such as their relationship with particular animals or their knowledge of particular natural phenomena; and reflect upon people's movements and orientation within the environment, e.g. relating to cosmic structures or more local infrastructure.

The interconnectedness of environment and music has also been mentioned and researched in other parts of the world. Feld (1981) writes that the Kaluli people in New Guinea explain musical structures with several kinds of metaphors that are all based on a single term, namely the term 'waterfall.' The experience of water serves as "an elaborate creative pool from which spring numerous conventional, as well as newly formed, metaphors about sound structure as 'flows'" (Feld 1981: 26). The ethnomusicologist Zemp who has conducted research among the Are'are people on the Solomon Islands shows that bamboo is the central focus of their discourse on music (Zemp 1978, 1979). Feld comparing his work with that of Zemp draws the conclusion that societies often express musical theory by means of polysemy and metaphor:

"While the Are'are case involves both more terminology and a greater diversity of sound structures to which it applies, the parallel is striking. Water and bamboo, core natural images with broad mythical and everyday cultural salience both materially and ideationally for these two groups are utilized as the basis for

metaphors of sound structure. (...) both societies verbally express musical theory by a metalanguage based on polysemy and metaphor (Feld 1981: 44).

Colin Turnbull who for a very long time has lived and worked among the Mbuti “Forest people” in former Zaire mentions another dimension of the relation of music and environment. He explains that the Are’are people imagine the forest as both benevolent and powerful, as it is the forest which provides everything for their living. The Mbuti people have a concept of quietness which stresses quietness as the ideal and as something very positive. For them, quietness is also closely intertwined with the peoples’ relation to the forest. This is expressed in sayings, such as “As quiet pleases the forest, so noise displeases it, (...)” (Feld 1996: 2). Music comes into play in the way that it is used to “awaken” or “please” the forest. Turnbull writes:

“The sound ‘awakens’ the forest...thus attracting the forest’s attention to the immediate needs of its children. It is also of the essential nature of all songs that they should be ‘pleasing to the forest’” (Turnbull 1965: 257).

Concerning ‘rhythm’ in particular, the environment has also been mentioned as inspiration and source for musical theories and discourse on musical experience in other parts of the world. Even if Feld, for instance, writes that there is more about melody in the verbalisation of Kaluli theory on music than about temporal aspects, they use terms deriving from water movements as musical terminology for pacing:

“(...) the notion of *gulu* or ‘flow’ in pacing involves metric pulsing of about 120 pulses per minute, a timbral continuity of sound while maintaining distinct pulses, and symbolic equivalences between dancer, *wo:kwele* bird, and sound/movement at a waterfall. Several other terms for moving water are commonly used as rhythmic terminology” (Feld 1981: 32-33).

One connection often drawn by the Malagasy musicians is that between the materiality of the musical instruments and the environment which provides the raw material. Although growing trade of goods and materials across the country as well as the imports of material and instruments from outside the island have also had an impact, there are many examples in Madagascar of which I only want to mention a few. There are for example different types of the Malagasy zither, the *valiha*. While the *valiha* in the High Plateaux region is built out of a long bamboo with the strings attached all around it, in the South of Madagascar where bamboo does not grow, there is a different type of *valiha*, the so-

called *marovany*, which is constructed of a wooden (or sometimes also metal) box with stings attached to each side of it. The *lokanga bara*, a type of violin that is played among the *Bara* people living in the South of the island has strings made out of vegetable fibre or goats gut.<sup>70</sup> It appears logical to imagine that the material, or the way of playing an instrument has an effect on the sound of the music. Many Malagasy musicians even argue that the playing style, which again is related to the way an instrument is built, also particularly relates to ‘rhythm’ as I will further explain in the next chapter as this is also an experience that I have made myself.

The majority of the musicians share the idea of a rhythmic base that is present everywhere on the island. However, the way they call it and refer to it differs a lot (see for example the musicians’ discourses analysed in the previous chapter). This basic assumption is also present in their ideas about environment and rhythm. The persistent discourses about sameness and difference that I discussed earlier also clearly come through in this theme as the following examples will show. Difference and sameness are negotiated within Madagascar, as for instance between different ethnic groups or the long established, often critical attitude between people from the High Plateaux and people from the Coast, but also between Madagascar and the outside world, especially the Western industrial countries.

Jean-Claude, for instance, regards the environment as the reason for the Malagasy 6/8 rhythm’s specificity in comparison to the same rhythm played outside Madagascar, especially in jazz music:

[30] « C’est l’environnement, parce que le 6/8 on le retrouve aussi dans le jazz des Etats-Unis, Miles Davis, il le fait depuis, tous les grands du jazz, Hendrix, Carlos Santana fait du 6/8 jusqu’à aujourd’hui. Mais leur vision, c’est différente aux Malgaches, et c’est l’environnement à Madagascar qui fait que le 6/8 est particulier et c’est ce qu’il fait qu’un type comme Santana qui est un maître du 6/8 s’en rêve de venir ici. » (Interview Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

Others rather emphasise *regional* differences in Madagascar that the environment creates with regard to music and rhythm. On a rather symbolic and metaphorical level Sammy, for example, is convinced that the rhythm in Madagascar is unique and compares its different appearances with a chameleon:

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<sup>70</sup> For a further detailed description of Malagasy instruments, please see Randrianary (2001): p. 109-114.

[31] « Mais ça vient de Madagascar. C'est-à-dire qu'on est dans une île qu'on appelle les Malgaches et comme je t'avais expliqué, ça dépend de chaque région où il est. C'est comme un caméléon. Tombe le caméléon dans une plante verte, et il sera vert. Quand il sera dans une plante marron, il sera marron. C'est à dire, ça dépend de la région, de la terre, de son village natal où il est. Et c'est là qu'il rentre l'inspiration. C'est à cause de la terre Ça leur donne l'inspiration. » (Interview Sammy, 23.11.2007)

On a more concrete level, Ricky and Rakotomavo make a similar statement. Ricky talks about the same “groove” that exists everywhere in Madagascar and argues that it is the environment which determines the people’s sensibility towards the environment as it for instance influences their relation to animals. At the same time he argues that the physical environment also influences the rhythm of each region and therefore produces *different* “grooves.” He once explained to me that the distance to the sea or to the forest for instance makes a big difference to the individual’s own sensibility towards the environment.<sup>71</sup> This example reveals that it is actually not only the environment that has an impact, but that it is all about positioning oneself within this environment. Ricky not only speaks about the Southern landscape that is vast and monotonous, but also describes the image of having the zebu cows “behind you.” He positions himself as someone from the High Plateaux region and with regard to all the mountains and stairs describes the environment as “quieter” and “wavy” in comparison to the South. However, despite these differences in the specificity of the environment, in general for him, all Malagasy people share the same sensibility towards the environment:

[32] « Parce que si c'est Antandroy, par exemple, si un Antandroy joue quelque chose rythmiquement et mélodie et harmoniquement, c'est pas la même chose même de Fianarantsoa, juste à coté de Tuléar et Fort Dauphin, parce que là-bas l'environnement c'est un peu...un peu vaste et grand, tu vois ? Donc, eux ils ont la possibilité de faire des différents rythmes...rythmes... Et en même temps de créer quelques mélodies avec les rythmes. (...) Oui, parce que c'est pas le même groove (il clappe les mains au même temps). C'est pas le même groove. Là bas c'est (il montre), quand t'as vu...tu vois...quand t'as vu des zébus, des trucs comme ça derrière toi et le rythme ça symbolise les bêtes comme les zébus quoi. Mais ici c'est plutôt calme et très ondulé. Donc, à mon avis, c'est par rapport à tous les montagnes, les escaliers, des trucs comme ça. (...) Tous les Malgaches : (il montre). Et ça, ça fait bouger tout le monde, même...même groove, même sensibilité. Mais si on va rentrer dans la spécificité d'environnement, là tu verras que ça c'est plutôt Antanosy, même si eux ils font de kilalaka, même chose, mais

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<sup>71</sup> Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008.



il y a une expression différente par rapport à la sensibilité et à l'environnement. »  
(Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

Rakotomavo has a similar view, emphasising that it is a common phenomenon, even world-wide, that it is the environment that becomes the people's source of inspiration on various levels. He argues that there are therefore differences from region to region and likewise Ricky compares the High Plateaux region with the South of the island. He equally stresses the impact of the mountains in the High Plateaux region that make people play a lot with echoes which then results in call and response singing forms, and the monotonous character of the songs from the South. He further gives an example of how the relation with animals in the environment impacts on the music. He argues that it is even the actual animals' sound that is integrated into the people's songs:

[33] « Et je rentre là, là la région tu sais où ils habitent ces gens ? C'est leur source d'inspiration, l'environnement. Leur source d'inspiration. Ils utilisent donc de façon acoustique, l'air d'environnement. Ils construisent aussi des instruments de cet environnement là. Donc, ça va dépendre de l'environnement là. Comme les gens disent, ils aiment des chansons responsoriales, qui se répondent quoi. Parce que les Hauts Plateaux, c'est une région une région avec un relief très accidenté, il y a beaucoup des montagnes. Et ils jouent de l'écho. (Il montre) Il y a un qui commence et le reste qui répondent. Donc, ça c'est l'environnement qui fait ça. Par contre quand tu vas dans le Sud, c'est le bush, il y a la savane, la brousse, c'est plutôt des chansons monotones. (...) Ça dépend de l'environnement quoi. Ça c'est une base connue. Je crois que c'est un peu dans le monde partout quoi. Pour les gens de la forêt, bon, c'est plutôt, dans leurs chansons on entend le gazouillement des oiseaux, des... Ils aiment ça, ils font ça. » (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

Some of the musicians are also convinced that the environment has an effect on the people's mood or characteristics which then, in turn, also influences music and rhythm. Interestingly, in this respect, is that comparisons are always drawn between the "Côtiers" and the people of the High Plateaux region. This might have to do with the fact that the relation between people from the High Plateaux region, especially from the capital and people from the coast has long been conflict-ridden because of various historical and political reasons (see also chapter 2.1). The musicians, however, argue in rather non-political terms, such as temperature difference. *Salegy* star Jaojoby assumes that temperature has an impact on people's character and that therefore people from the High Plateaux region are calmer than people from the hotter coastal regions. He neither

positions himself specifically as someone from the Coast, nor from the High Plateaux region. However, positioning within the environment again comes through in his description of the long vistas that are possible from the High Plateaux region - an image that I have come across a few times:

[34] « Disons que sur les côtes, il fait plus chaud, on est plus... Eh ? (il rit) Ah oui ! Sur les Hauts Plateaux, on est là donc sur les Plateaux, on est plutôt donc dans la méditation. Oui, on regarde loin. Je ne dis pas que c'est vrai, eh ? C'est mon avis quoi ! (il rit) » (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

Ariry (alias Ariry Andriamoratsiresy) is a choreographer who also works and gives dancing classes in the *Rarihasina* culture centre in Antananarivo.<sup>72</sup> He has been collaborating projects with Ricky and has also travelled abroad, for example to West Africa and to France, where he performed and gave dancing workshops. Ariry, similarly to Jaojoby, stresses the impact of temperature. He explains that he has experienced different ways of learning and of understanding rhythm among people from the Coast and people from the High Plateaux region.

[35] « Je sais pas. Peut-être c'est une question de température. Question de température et de... de... (...) C'est ça. Et je me suis demandé que peut-être c'est à cause de... Je sais pas. J'ai pas encore fait l'analyse, mais seulement déduction comme ça. Mais peut-être il y a une impact à propos de la température, et l'altitude et position du soleil. Je sais pas.... Ça donne, ça donne... un impact psychologique et fonctionnement intellectuel ou spirituel ou sensationnel surtout. Donc, le rythme c'est ça. » (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

For Ariry, self-positioning and the question of orientation and moving within the environment seem very important as his memories of two of his journeys abroad clearly show. The first trip was to West Africa where he was struggling to understand the rhythm and explains that this difficulty is closely related to his own habits of orientation, as for instance with regard to the rhythm of daylight and darkness.

[36] “Mais quand j'étais en Afrique, Afrique de l'Ouest, il y avait aussi un rythme que j'arrive pas à capter. Ils ont un certain, un certain... des compositions rythmiques, et contretemps que j'arrive même pas à écouter ou entendre. Donc, l'explication que moi, je pourrais apporter c'est que... c'est question d'orientation, orientation spatiale... A quelle heure le soleil se positionne et ce positionnement... c'est par rapport cosmique et spatiale. Ça engendre pleins des réactions... réactions dans la coordination et dans la réflexion de la personne. » (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

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<sup>72</sup> For more information on the *Rarihasina* cultural centre, see Fuhr (2006).

His second trip was to France and it was again the environmental differences, especially the difference in sunrise and sunset that caused trouble to his sense of rhythm:

[37] « Voilà. Parce que le soleil c'est dans le rythme. La fréquence qu'il revient et tout ça. Et quand j'étais en France la première fois en été, j'étais à Montpellier. (...) J'étais désordonné tout de suite quoi. En voyant le soleil à dix heure du soir, j'étais complètement perdu quoi, à l'époque la première fois quand j'ai vu ça, parce que ça trouble mon habitude rythmique, voilà. Et donc, la danse et la musique c'est la déduction et le résultat de tout ça, je pense. » (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

In summary, all musicians agree that the environment has an enormous influence on music and rhythm in particular. The range of different aspects that are part of the environment is very diverse: the geographical nature or physical landscape is mentioned as well as peoples' attitudes or sensibility towards the environment they are living in. This also includes the people's relation to animals, such as to the all important zebu cows which are often mentioned as a working force. Animals also appear as metaphors, such as the chameleon which is drawn on to represent the unity and diversity of the Malagasy rhythm. Further, the environment is often described as a source, be it a source of inspiration or for food. Many musicians argue that it also influences people and therefore music-makers in the way that it has an impact on people's characteristics of life style habits. Here, it is interesting to notice that differences are mainly stressed between the High Plateaux region and the Coastal regions. This is, however, not expressed in any terms related to politics, but rather through the idea that temperature has an impact on people's mood.

For many musicians the question of how one is positioned within the environment plays an important role. This does not only embrace physical positioning, such as long vistas that are possible in the High Plateaux region, but also leads towards a more general idea of positioning in relation to other people. A debate of sameness and difference persistently informs the musicians' discourses and takes place on different levels as musicians make comparisons within Madagascar as well as between Madagascar and the outside, especially the Western world. If compared with the outside world, the "same groove" or Madagascar's rhythmical particularity is stressed; whereas within Madagascar the emphasis rather lies on regional differences seen as created by the natural

environment. The constant shift between in-groups and out-groups is quite a well-known factor in processes of identity construction. Meinhof and Galasinski, for example, argue that it is especially through narrativisation that “[w]e position ourselves within and against the spaces and the people whom we see of belonging or not belonging to our own groups” (Meinhof and Galasinski 2005: 102). Whereas some musicians speak from a very personal or individual point of view, as for instance Ariry who talks about his personal experiences while travelling, others rather speak from a wider angle; for instance as someone from the High Plateaux region or more specifically from the capital or on a more general level even, as a Malagasy person. Questions about ‘who I am’ and ‘who I am not’ are constantly touched upon and the interweaving comparisons on different levels show that identities are persistently negotiated throughout the musicians’ discourses.

### Everyday life

Malagasy everyday life can hardly be separated from the topos of the environment as many of the musicians’ arguments and ideas clearly show. Many of them state that the environment we live in influences and even determines our everyday activities. It makes for instance an enormous difference whether people live in cities or in the countryside; whether they live in coastal areas where one finds harbours and ships (offering work, trade etc), and where fishing is immensely important or whether people live in very dry and hot savannah like areas where water is rare. Many musicians argue that in our everyday life we accustom ourselves to the environment we are living in and it definitely affects aspects of our life, such as food, work, our movements and other habits. They also say that it has a strong effect on music and rhythm in particular, as they argue that music and rhythm are already inherent in various aspects of their everyday life.

The diversity of examples that the musicians give for rhythm being inherent in Malagasy everyday life is astonishing. The majority of the musicians tend to emphasise the inseparability of everyday activities and music or rhythm in particular. Samy (alias Samuelson Rabenirainy) is living in Antananarivo and in the 1970s was member of the group “Lolo sy ny tariny” (already mentioned in chapter 2.3) in which he played the violin. He only very occasionally performs in so-called “cabarets” (smaller concerts,

often in restaurants or bars), but is highly interested in music research himself. Samy used to work as a journalist for the MBS television (Madagascar Broadcasting System; affiliated with the party of President Marc Ravalomanana who at the time of writing is still in exile in South Africa) that was burned down, destroyed and closed in the course of the riots in the beginning of 2009 by supporters of Andry Rajoelina. Over many years Samy has collected musics from all around the island and has gathered a valuable collection of recordings. Samy once explained to me that you can actually hear the ‘6/8 rhythm’ in the jiggling of the coins that the little boys who sell sweets on the Avenue de l’Indépendance in Antananarivo hold in their hands.<sup>73</sup> Another example comes from Erick Manana who has worked for a long time with the famous *sodina* player Rakotofrah (who passed away in 2001). In a conversation he once told me that when Rakotofrah was eating, you actually saw him playing the flute and when watching him playing the flute you could easily imagine him eating.<sup>74</sup> I will come back to flutist Rakoto Frah in the next chapter.

In general, there are two symbols or ‘themes’ that tend to appear more often than others: zebu cows and rice plus various activities surrounding or belonging to these two ‘themes.’ Another connection that is often drawn by musicians is that rhythm is also inherent in everyday speaking habits of Malagasy people. In the same conversation just mentioned above, Samy also told me that the ‘6/8 rhythm’ could be heard in the bus drivers’ shouting to gather people for their journeys in Antananarivo.<sup>75</sup> Others again persist on the important role that singing has in everyday contexts. Bilo for examples explains that singing itself is a “way of living”:

[38] « Le salegy c’est...comment on dit aussi? C’est la façon de vivre. Tu vois, le salegy c’est la façon de vivre. Donc, on vit avec le salegy...chez nous, tu es heureux, tu chantes. Tu es malheureux, tu chantes. Tu fais ta cuisine, tu chantes. Tu chantes toujours le salegy. Donc c’est la façon de vivre. » (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

These ideas are grounded in some of the musicians’ assumptions that there is a close relation between rhythm and the Malagasy language as we will see in the next part. The

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<sup>73</sup> Conversation with Samy, Antananarivo, December 2007.

<sup>74</sup> Conversation with Erick Manana, Paris, 28.2.2008.

<sup>75</sup> Conversation with Samy, Antananarivo, December 2007.

topos of dance also already appears in the musicians' ideas about everyday life. Although I will discuss this later on as a topos in its own right, it clearly shows again how all these topoi are in fact interconnected.

On a very general level, there are two further assumptions that are shared among some of the musicians. Firstly, that in some way all Malagasy people are musicians and secondly, that the Malagasy '6/8 rhythm' is a rhythm that everyone could easily adapt to and identify with. Sammy for instance is convinced that all Malagasy people are musicians and explains that as soon as someone starts making a rhythm, the others immediately join in:

[39] « Moi, je dirais que, je dirais vraiment que les Malgaches, ce sont des gens tous musiciens. On est né pour la musique là. Parce que tant que tu vois quelqu'un donner un début du rythme, trrrrr ! » (Interview Sammy, 23.11.2007)

Samy speaks of the "universality" of Malagasy music. He argues that it is a music that everyone can easily identify with, not at least as he regards this rhythm as a "synthesis of civilisation" and as a metre that "composes itself" in reality:

[40] « Tout le monde peut se retrouver dans cette structure musicale. Pour tout le monde, c'est très facile à s'adapter. (...) En réalité cette universalité de cette musique, ce n'est pas une lecture...ethnocentriste comme disent certaines hypothèses. Mais c'est justement le résultat d'une synthèse de civilisation. (...) Parce que c'est un temps qui se compose en réalité qui s'adapte à tous les temps. » (Interview Samy, 7.12.2007)

He gives further evidence for his idea of the '6/8 rhythm' as a "universal metre" with several examples from everyday life. He argues that everything works according to a "biological clock," starting from the cockcrow and the sunrise. However, most examples for the expression of this "biological clock" he mentions are movements, such as marching, running, or the zebu cows pulling the cart:

[41] « Oui le 6/8, parce que là je vais t'expliquer un phénomène. La vie des Malgaches là, est réglée par l'horloge biologique. Donc, c'est rattaché intimement à la vie quotidienne. L'horloge malgache, c'est quand le coq chante et le soleil lève la tête, c'est ça. Donc, tout est... Comment on peut dire ça... Tout est régulé par rapport à ce qu'on appelle l'horloge biologique. Donc, c'est au rapport qu'ils sentent, les Malgaches sentent et ce qu'il fait dans la vie quotidienne, c'est l'expression de tout ça. Quand tu entends le 6/8, tu peux utiliser le 6/8 comme la marche, marche militaire.

(...) Le 6/8, c'est vraiment ça, même si tu fais le jogging, c'est le 6/8. (...) La marche normalement c'est en 2 ou 4 temps, mais quand tu cours, quand tu...par exemple poursuivies les bœufs et tout ça, la charrette, même si tu vois la charrette dans le Sud, quand les zébus tirent la charrette, c'est 6/8. C'est vraiment un temps universel. » (Interview Samy, 7.12.2007)

He argues that everything in everyday life is 'rhythmacised' and that this rhythm often has a function, such as supporting work or lulling children to sleep. He therefore says that it is related to the tempo of the everyday life. People use, play and compose this rhythm that inherits their everyday life as his example of the Antandroy people shows who even when walking do not feel or think in a binary rhythm, but the '6/8 rhythm' which is always present and related to their everyday life:

[42] « (...) même la façon de marcher, on sent un peu le 6/8. Les Antandroy vont pas marcher 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2...c'est un peuple marcheuse si on peut dire (il rit) qui joue des temps composés en marchant quoi. C'est lié, c'est lié vraiment au tempo de la vie, de la vie quotidienne. Même si on fait quelque chose, il y a un chant adapté à ça, si on transporte des pierres par exemple, il y a quelqu'un qui dit 'Alefa !' (Il chante) C'est pour rythmer, conjuguer l'effort en même temps. Et ça se forge petit à petit, cette pratique rituelle en réalité. (...) Même pour bercer les enfants, c'est rythmé par rapport à la...par rapport au chant (il chante). C'est rythmé, c'est toujours rythmé, rythmé, rythmé. » (Interview Samy, 24.11.2007)

Jazz saxophonist Seta agrees on the point that Malagasy everyday life is always 'rhythmic.' He explained to me that this is a big difference to life in Europe. In Europe, people have to some extent 'lost' the rhythm of everyday life in the way that modern European trains, for example, are now making no more noise and therefore are 'giving no more rhythm'.<sup>76</sup>

Ratovo (alias Ratovonirina Ranaivovololona) is a *valiha* player from Antananarivo who also builds the instruments himself. He works at the Ministry of Culture and has also opened a very small private museum that holds a collection of instruments from across the island. Ratovo shares Samy's idea that rhythm is closely related to work. He explains that it was common to sing during work in order to facilitate difficult movements, such as moving heavy stones, or create a nice atmosphere. This singing, or sometimes even shouting, also created rhythm:

[43] « Je sais pas, mais d'après qu'on fait des travaux, les travaux dans le champs, il n'y a pas de musique, mais on chante (il chante), et en même temps on chante

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<sup>76</sup> Conversation with Seta, Antananarivo, 22.7.2008.

pour arriver pour faire glisser les gros pierres, pour arriver à un tel mètre ou pour pousser, pour travailler, ou pour créer...pendant les colonisations ou avant comme ça, il y a un travail d'équipe et dans le travail d'équipe, on chante et on fait des cris pour animer du travail et on crée des chanson comme des esclave ou...et on crée des rythmes. Et pour...parce que les proverbes malgaches, on chante et on chante en même temps dans le travail et on ne sent pas que le travail est très dur et très fort quelque chose comme ça. Et on pouvait avec le chant et le rythme et on arrive à créer une bonne ambiance dans le travail. Et c'est là que naît les rythmes. » (Interview Ratovo, 26.7.2008)

The aspect that movements are related to rhythm passes through almost all the musicians' statements regarding everyday life, whether they talk about movements to facilitate work, or whether they talk about walking or dancing.

Rakotomavo argues that the Malagasy rhythm exists of a structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries. The ternary structure is what he calls "analytical metre" and the binary structure is what he calls "synthetic metre." He thinks that the "synthetic metre" is based on walking, the "analytical metre", in turn, is related to language (as we will see in more detail in the next part). He explains this with an example of the *Betsileo* region where he considers the regional dialect very close, sometimes even inseparable, from singing:

[44] « Là, c'est, je pense bien que c'est très primitif. Qu'est-ce qu'il est basé de ce temps ? La marche alors. C'est pas la marche militaire, eh ? C'est la marche. Et comme il y a des gens qui font toujours le trajet à pied, ils sont toujours en train de marcher, ils ont toujours ce rythme là. (...) Là, il faut pas oublier, je reviens à ce que j'ai dit en avant... il faut pas oublier qu'on utilise la langue dans la mélodie. Et les mots dans la langue. Il y a des gens, même quand ils parlent, il y a des régions, je prends l'exemple de la région de Betsileo, quand ils parlent on dirait qu'ils chantent. Ils parlent comme ça (il montre). On dirait qu'ils chantent. Dans la vie courante. Donc, il n'y a pas cette notion de mélodie à part ! C'est déjà dans la vie quotidienne quoi ! Même quand ils se parlent, on dirait qu'ils chantent entre eux. »

(Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

As mentioned above, also dance movements appear in the musicians' ideas about rhythm in everyday life. Interestingly they often refer to the Malagasy zebu cows which again relates to the other reoccurring theme, namely that of rice.

Jaobjoby remembers how French tourists once compared *salegy* dance with the movements of zebu cows:



[45] « Oui, il y avait des Français des années 70, moi j'étais jeune, je jouais dans une boîte de nuit, quand on joue le salegy là, ils arrivent, ils ont plaisanté : "on va faire la danse de zébus". C'est un peu comme les zébus qui piétinent la rizière. Ça tourne en rond comme ça le salegy. » (Interview Jaobjoby, 21.8.2008)

The idea that people copy the zebu cows in their movements and in their dances is also present in Rakotomavo's example from the *Bara* region in the South of Madagascar. He explains that it is often movements in everyday life that create rhythm, such as the pounding of rice in the High Plateaux region. The *Bara* people are always with their zebu cows and in their dances they imitate the movements of these animals. He further gives an example from the *Vezo* people who are fishers and who live at the South-West coast of the island. In their dances, you can easily hear the casting of the fishing net:

[46] « Non, mais le rythme c'est plutôt à partir de leur condition de vie, ce qu'ils font tous les jours. Tu sais, les gens des Hauts Plateaux, comme ils pilent le riz, comme ils pilent le riz, ils font du riz, et on pile le riz... C'est pas un seul qui va piler ou une seule, c'est trois, quatre (il montre le rythme). Ça, c'est le rythme. C'est là qu'ils acquièrent de temps en temps ce rythme. Egalement les zébus. Il y a une semaine, deux semaines là, un festival dans le Sud (...) dans la région d'Isalo, dans la région des Baras. Et comme les Baras ne se séparent jamais des bœuf, leurs danses ce qu'ils font les bœuf quoi. Ils copient ce qu'ils font les bœufs, parce que...qu'est-ce qu'ils font tous les jours ? Ils gardent les bœufs, donc ils sont toujours en contact avec ces animaux là. Ils les gardent, ils observent, ils essaient de copier ce qu'ils font. Qu'est-ce qu'ils font, quand ils dansent, quand ils dansent (il montre la danse) les bœufs, ils font comme ça et les danseurs ils font comme ça. Et comme les bœufs donnent des coups de patte, ils font comme ça et c'est ça le karatsaka. Donc, à partir des choses de tous les jours, de ce qu'ils font tous les jours, ils apprennent aussi. A part l'environnement donc, il y a aussi ce qu'ils font tous les jours. C'est leur vie quotidienne, c'est ça. Les Vezo qui sont des grand pêcheurs, c'est le coup de.....de fivoy, on appelle ça le fivoy (il montre). Et quand ils dansent, tu entends ça toujours dans les danses. » (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

Ariry mentions another everyday activity and movement related to the theme or 'symbol' of rice, namely digging the rice fields with the feet. As people do this work every day, it also gives rhythm:

[47] Ariry : « Il y a une certaine...une certaine explication et interprétation, quand tu tapes le sol par le pied, ça veut dire quelque chose. Ça veut dire quelque chose dans le rite, dans la tradition, dans le... la vie quotidienne. Par exemple, si jamais tu vas dans la rizière, les formes... les formes de... comment on dit ça ? De bêcher la terre, il y avait pas encore les bêches, les trucs tracteurs comme ça. Mais c'est par les pieds, par des bois. Donc, on utilise les pieds, on tape sur le sol. Donc,

c'est cette forme quotidienne que quand ils dansent les gens dans les villages, ça revient automatiquement. »

Jenny : « Et ça donne aussi déjà... »

Ariry : « Le rythme, bien sûr. Et c'est automatique, parce que tous les jours, il fait comme ça. » (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

In summary, all musicians share the idea that rhythm is already inherent in everyday activities or movements, such as working, speaking, walking, or dancing, to name but a few that have occurred in the musicians' discourses. Two 'themes' appear all the time and are also often mentioned in relation to each other: the zebu cows and the rice. Various activities surrounding these two 'themes' are mentioned in relation to rhythm, such as the zebu cows pulling the cart or the zebu cows ploughing the rice fields. Musicians also give attention to the relation of these two 'themes' with the people themselves, as for example people imitate the zebu cows in their dances or that they need these animals to produce their everyday rice. With the exception of the examples of the bus drivers shouting in the '6/8 rhythm' and the boys' jiggling with coins in Antananarivo's streets, all examples of everyday activities very much depict life in the countryside. This identification with the rural population of Madagascar is striking as all of the musicians represented in this work live in or at least come from the capital. Most of them do not in their everyday lives work on rice fields, go fishing or are in direct contact with zebu cows. However, as for the vast majority of Malagasy people these activities definitely form part of their everyday routine, the musicians seem to consider them typically Malagasy. Most of the musicians also have family in the countryside and some even have lived parts of their lives in rural areas before they moved to Antananarivo, often in the hope to improve their chances of starting a musical career. Therefore, even if they all live in the capital now, many of them have experienced life in the countryside and are often very knowledgeable about farming, harvesting, fishing or similar activities. I have described the important role that Antananarivo plays for the musicians in chapter 2.3 (see Kiwan and Meinhof 2011). Let us now revisit the debate on sameness and difference. In contrast to the ideas and assumptions that the musicians made about the relation of rhythm and the environment, within the topos of everyday life, they tend to emphasise sameness rather than difference, even within Madagascar. Regional differences are mentioned, such as the *Antandroy*

being “walking people” and the *Vezo* people for whom fishing is very important. However, these examples are not mentioned in a way that stresses differences. The Malagasy rhythmical structure (whether referred to as 6/8 or not) is rather understood and described as a unifying element. Musicians describe it as a result of the mixture of cultures and influences that are present in Madagascar and that have formed a ‘synthesis.’ Similar discourses about musical syntheses and the fusion and mixture of musical styles can also be found in ethnomusicological literature on Madagascar (see for example Schmidhofer 1995 or Harison 2005). Scholars have also emphasised the close relation of music and everyday life, such as Malagasy scholars Rakotomalala (2003) and Randrianary (2001). Some musicians also characterise the rhythmical structure as very flexible and argue that everyone, also non-Malagasy people, can easily identify with it. I will come back to this argument in the next chapter where I will describe in detail how I personally experience and understand this structure when musicking. These ideas suggest a more open and including rather than excluding attitude towards the world outside Madagascar. Although there are reoccurring and overlapping themes and symbols within the two topoi of environment and everyday life, identities and questions of belonging are constructed and negotiated very differently.

### Language

Another topos that has been extremely relevant and helpful for my own learning and playing of Malagasy music and that I will therefore revisit in the following chapter is that of the Malagasy language. Most Malagasies, musicians included, stress the unity of Malagasy language and the fact that it is the only African country with one language that all Malagasies share and speak, albeit with various dialects. The spread of Malagasy throughout the island can be described as a “continuum of dialects [...] with mutual comprehensibility [...] estimated at no less than 60% of the lexicon even at the extreme ends of the continuum” (Rasolofondraosolo and Meinhof 2003: 130).

The idea that all Malagasy people can understand each other from wherever they come from is consistently emphasised by the musicians. Samy, for instance, regards language as the base and foundation of all common musical structures that he identifies in Malagasy musical styles, such as the ‘6/8 rhythm,’ polyphony or the call and response

singing style called *antsa*, already mentioned in the discussion on *salegy* music in the previous chapter.<sup>77</sup> Bilo also emphasises the fact that they all share one official language and even concludes that therefore Malagasy people always recognise each other easily:

[48] « J'arrive pas à expliquer comment, mais ça ce qu'on appelle malgache, parce que nous, on est différent des autres... oui, des autres gens. Donc, peut-être ça vient de cela, parce qu'on a tous les rythmes, on a tous les rythmes, mais le rythme essentiel c'est le 6/8 et on a une langue... notre langue officielle. On a notre langue officielle. C'est pas la langue des Imerina, mais c'est une langue officielle et on se connaît... pas comme les Africains ou les... tu vois les Congolais. Ils ont des différentes ethnies et ils se parlent en français pour se faire connaître, mais pas leur langue. Mais nous, les Malgaches, même tu viens du Sud, du Nord, de l'Ouest on se connaît toujours. » (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

Personally I have experienced a few situations that actually showed me that this wishful thinking of the possibility of boundless communication is not always and necessarily the case and that dialectical difference can turn out to be a challenge. I had the chance to be present at the very first rehearsal of Justin Vali's "Ny Malagasy orchestra," introduced in the last chapter. The different members of this group who come from many different regions of the island had difficulties in understanding each other's dialect. The most obvious problems of communications were between the musicians from the Southern regions and the musicians from the capital.<sup>78</sup> Erick Manana, once asked to translate one of his songs from Malagasy to French told me that he first had to speak to his friend who had written the lyrics for this song. This friend was from the North-West coast and there were many expressions that Erick Manana himself could not translate easily from this particular dialect.<sup>79</sup>

The topos of language has already come up within the previous topoi discussed above, as singing for example is regarded as an everyday activity or that singing, again, is closely related to speaking. The following presentation of the musicians' ideas regarding the direct connection of language and rhythm show that some of them even go deeper into the analysis of the actual *structure* of the Malagasy language.

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<sup>77</sup> Conversation with Samy, Antananarivo, 7.12.2007.

<sup>78</sup> Personal observation during the rehearsal of Justin's "Ny Malagasy Orchestra," Mahabo Andoharanofotsy, 22.11.2007.

<sup>79</sup> Conversation with Erick Manana, France, February 2009.

Rakotomavo is definitely the biggest advocator among the musicians of the idea that music and language are inseparable which he also explains with the fact that singing and speaking are closely interrelated. Malagasy music therefore always means singing and there are also different forms of semi-singing:

[49] « Bon, comme nous avons la langue d'un côté, l'unicité de la langue, on peut parler également de l'unicité de la musique malgache. Il faut pas oublier que la musique malgache, est toujours chantée. Donc, on utilise la langue dedans. On réplique la langue dans la musique. Il y a des formes semi chantées qu'on appelle le jijy, le saova, quelque chose comme ça. Ce sont des formes semi chantées. Donc, la base c'est la langue. » (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

He gives an example of the *Betsileo* region in the Southern High Plateaux area, where rhythmical speaking is often part of a musical performance:

[50] « Les Betsileos ils appellent ça le kipotsaka, quand ils chantent, quand ils chantent, tout d'un coup ils s'arrêtent à chanter et avant de danser ils font ce qu'on appelle kipotsaka, ils parlent comme ça et de façon rythmée (il montre). Ils parlent, mais le rythme est toujours là. » (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

As already mentioned above, Rakotomavo always sees a structure of binaries and ternaries in Malagasy music, distinguishing “synthetic metre” from “analytic metre,” with the latter being based on the language. Interestingly, although making such a general statement, here he describes it with a particular regional example, namely the dialect of the High Plateaux region. In this dialect, words are often trisyllabic and once they are integrated into the music, the emphasis of the words (whether for instance the second or third syllable is emphasised) is kept. This is also the reason why he argues that there are no strong and weak beats in the music itself, but that it is the emphasis of the words that is important:

[51] « C'est la mesure synthétique qui est toujours à deux temps, et là, c'est la mesure analytique qui se rapproche, donc, toujours de la langue. C'est ça. Et c'est la superposition de ces deux. (...) Bon... moi, j'avance une hypothèse, mais c'est une hypothèse qui est à moi là. Ça part de la langue. La plupart des mots là, surtout pour nous, les gens des Hauts Plateaux, c'est des mots trisyllabiques. Tanana, tongotra... ce sont des mots trisyllabiques. Et ce sont ces mots, donc, une fois intégrés dans la musique, on doit encore garder l'accent, c'est pourquoi il n'y a pas des temps forts ou des temps faibles. C'est l'accent des mots même, l'accent qu'on... Parce que deux mots, je prends un exemple de t̃anana et tanàna. T̃anana, c'est la main et l'autre c'est la ville, le village. » (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

The issue of accentuation and strong and weak beats will be a central theme in the next chapter when I look at my own musical practices. The close relation of music and language with regard to accentuation has also been researched in other parts of the world. Ethnomusicologist Henry Stobart and music psychologist Ian Cross (2000) in a joined research project have undertaken studies on the so-called “Easter songs” in the Bolivian Andes. Having performed listening and clapping exercises with subjects from different culture and language backgrounds, they found out that Bolivian subject who all spoke *Quechua* or *Aymara* as their mother tongue, even though many did not know this specific music before, clapped in time with the performer’s footfalls - in contrast to all European subjects (Stobart and Cross 2000: 81). A possible explanation for this, they see in the prosodic structure of both languages, *Quechua* and *Aymara*, in which the “Easter songs” are sung (Stobart and Cross 2000: 83-84). Therefore they argue that language is significant for the understanding of rhythmic structure and rhythmic perception in Andean music (Stobart and Cross 2000: 88).<sup>80</sup> I will revisit Stobart and Cross’ study in more detail in the next chapter.

Ricky is also convinced that the ‘6/8 rhythm’ is inherent in Malagasy language and similarly sees an importance in the emphasis/accenuation of words that impact on the music. In contrast to Rakotomavo, he speaks of strong and weak beats as a result and explains that he always experienced that the ‘strong beats’ in Madagascar were different to those of the African mainland. His explanation for this is that he always felt a sense of “future” in the sound and emphasis of Malagasy words, such as *andrandràina* (meaning: “to give value to something”).<sup>81</sup>

For *valiha* player and singer Rajery music and text also go together which he explains by means of his own composition techniques. It varies whether he first composes the music and adds the lyrics later on or vice versa. He describes the process of composing as finding a collage of both, text and music:

[52] « Bon, je t’explique d’abord, parce que moi, la musique, c’est très lié aussi avec les textes. Parce que moi, j’imagine, quelquefois ça m’arrive les textes et après, je fais la musique après. Des fois, ça m’arrive aussi la musique et les textes

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<sup>80</sup> They “warn” however, that Spanish and Quechua music, for example, should not be seen as neatly isolated spheres. Also, the studied “Easter songs” incorporate a number of Spanish loan words, and Quechua words have often been set to melodies derived from Spanish prosody and vice versa.

<sup>81</sup> Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008.

après. Mais j'essaie toujours, comment dirais-je, de trouver ce collage, par exemple, je veux la musique adéquate avec les textes. Et les textes, c'est pareil. Et aussi l'esprit de la chanson, le thème de la chanson. » (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

One question certainly then comes up as not all Malagasy music is accompanied by texts or singing. Rakotomavo, however, argues that instrumental music is still related to language in the way that it should be understood as 'songs that are no longer sung.' He says that people who play instrumental music always have the lyrics on their mind:

[53] Rakotomavo : « La musique instrumentale, c'est un peu le secret de la musique instrumentale malgache. La plupart de la musique instrumentale, ce sont des chansons qu'on ne chante plus. Moi, ce que... »

Jenny : « Ça veut dire que la langue est toujours là, même si... »

Rakotomavo : « Elle est toujours là. Elle est toujours là. Et tu arrives à bien jouer cette musique instrumentale quand tu connais... quand tu as dans ta tête les paroles. Tu chantes pas, mais tu les as dans ta tête. C'est mieux. » (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

Similar ideas about playing techniques and different ways of thinking while musicking, especially concerning rhythm, will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Another topic that has already been touched upon, though more indirectly, within the discussion of the other topoi is that of tempo. Some musicians think that the environment or life style has an effect on people's mood, characteristics, dancing or speaking habits which then, in turn, also influences the music, and in particular the tempo of the music. Hajazz, however, sees a direct link between language and tempo and even uses the strong metaphor of a "marriage." He further explains that it is not the rhythm that differs from region to region, but the dialect that people speak:

[54] Hajazz : « Parce qu'on pense que ça c'est déjà longtemps que ça existe. Quoi dire ? Le mariage du tempo et le langage malgache. Ça fait longtemps. Ça fait longtemps que ça existe. »

Jenny : « Mariage, ça veut dire que le tempo est lié... »

Hajazz : « Lié à, lié à... la langue. »

Jenny : « Ça veut dire aussi que c'est ça qui fait la différence entre, par exemple, les Hauts Plateau et les autres régions ? Parce que le dialecte ici c'est différent ? »

Hajazz : « Non... c'est le dialecte... Donc, la signification est toujours pareille, mais le dialecte, c'est le dialecte qui est un peu différent. Mais le sens... quoi dire ? Le sens des mots et tout ça, c'est pareil... sauf dans le Sud, les Antandroy ils ont un peu... »

Jenny : « Et là aussi le rythmique est différent ? »

Hajazz : « Non non, pas trop... C'est ça qui est toujours identique, au niveau rythmique. » (Interview Hajazz, 12.8.2008)

In summary, the relation of rhythm and language is again experienced and understood through very different aspects. Speaking habits, such as the tempo of speaking, and regional dialects are mentioned as well as the structure of Malagasy language, the role that language plays as song lyrics and how this again influences composition techniques. Language is generally seen as a unifying element in Malagasy culture and all musicians tend to emphasise the possibility of understanding each other regardless of their regional origin. In some of the musicians' explanations, it even goes further than understanding, or at least understanding is meant in a wider sense, i.e. recognising each other easily which also implies 'being different than others' (outside Madagascar) as for instance Bilo describes it. This idea of sameness shared via the language also mirrors public and academic discourses on Malagasy language. Regional examples are mentioned in the musicians' discourses, albeit not to describe difference as it is the case within the topos of the environment. Samy for example speaks of the unity of Malagasy language on the one hand and then, on the other hand, makes a particular point for the people of the High Plateaux region who have very many trisyllabic words. In my personal observations, I have also recognised communication problems between people from different regions. However, the dominant discourse suggests that Malagasy language produces a rather pan-Malagasy identity as it is regarded and experienced as a unifying element and a shared tool.

### Dance

Another topos that has already come up as it is strongly related to movements is that of dance (for example dances that imitate the Malagasy zebu cows). Most musicians share the idea that dance is something which, similar to language, is also inseparable from music. Concerning rhythm in particular, the musicians' ideas again touch upon different aspects, such as choreography and how certain dancing styles have developed; or the particularity of the Malagasy '6/8 rhythm' and how this influences Malagasy dancing styles.



Rakotomavo considers rhythm to be the base for everything in Malagasy music which one “must have” also for dancing:

[55] « Avant de danser, il faut avoir le rythme. Sinon, c’est pas la danse, c’est la chorégraphie. Il y a une différence entre chorégraphie et la danse. Donc, c’est la base. » (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

Ricky is convinced that one of the characteristics of the Malagasy ‘6/8 rhythm’ is that it always makes people dance. He explains that when giving a performance, as soon as they enter the ‘6/8 rhythm,’ all dancers are really at ease and completely identify with it.

However, if they take it out, people still dance, but it becomes “plain”:

[56] « Quand je fais le truc avec Ariry, par exemple, on n’a pas des normes, des rythmes, mais on tape, on tape, on tape et quand tu donnes le 6/8, tous les danseurs ils sont vraiment à l’aise quoi. Ils se retrouvent vraiment dans le.... “Ouf, on est là !”. Mais si tu enlèves le rythme 6/8, ils dansent, mais c’est pas la même chose. Et là, je sais pas comment on va expliquer ça, mais des fois, c’est comme ça et ça chauffe, eh ? Dès que tu mets le truc en 6/8, tout le monde est parti et quand tu enlèves le 6/8, ça reste plat. » (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

Samy again emphasises the fact that the ‘6/8 rhythm’ can easily be adapted to other rhythms and that Malagasy people like to play with this in the way that they “adopt” foreign dances in classical metres, such as the waltz, to the Malagasy ‘6/8 rhythm:’

[57] « Ça veut dire, si tu veux danser le valse, tu peux le jouer avec le 6/8, tu peux danser le valse avec le 6/8. (...) Si si si. Pour la marche, ça va encore. Quelle danse aussi ? Bon, tout ce qui est en 2 temps, 3 temps, 4 temps. Les temps classiques. » (Interview Samy, 7.12.2007)

Jaobjoby’s reflection on the development of *salegy* dancing style mirrors Samy’s idea that the Malagasy ‘6/8 rhythm’ is flexible in the way that *salegy* nowadays is danced the way people want to dance it. Whereas for a long time the *salegy* had always been danced a certain way, people nowadays dance the way they like and Jaobjoby even speaks of the “dance of liberty.” One general characteristic is that people move a lot within the room where they dance:

[58] « Mais la danse là, quand on tape les pieds, au sol là, ça c’est depuis tous les temps, nos ancêtres ils dansaient comme ça. Ils tapaient du sol des pieds, donnant le rythme (il montre). Eh ben aujourd’hui on danse aussi comme ça. On danse comme ça le *salegy*. Les années 60, on danse le *salegy* un pas en avant, un pas en derrière, on avance comme ça. C’est un peu comme ça. Aujourd’hui on peut danser libre ! Ou on marche comme ça, on fait ce que l’on veut. En fait, tout ce qu’on veut, oui oui. Ah oui, le *salegy*, c’est la danse de la liberté ! Eh écoute, ça

c'est du moi... Eh c'est vrai ! Toi aussi, tu peux dire ça, puisque quand tu regardes les gens danser, ils font ce qu'ils veulent. A single, ou à deux personnes, ou à trois ou à plusieurs ! Mais en général, ils tournent en rond dans la salle, en général. Je sais pas si tu as remarqué ça. Par exemple quand il y a un bal dans une grande salle, quand on fait le salegy, en principe, ils tournent en rond dans la salle. » (Interview Jaobjoby, 21.8.2008)

Ratovo is also convinced that rhythm is related to dance and has realised changes in dancing styles. According to him, these changes still happen within an “own manner.” He describes the new dances, such as the *kilalaka*, as very creative and even as a “revelation.” The causes for these changes in dance are influences from abroad, especially from the African mainland:

[59] Ratovo: « Les danses aussi c'est lié avec, oui, parce que même si vous avez bien remarqué maintenant avec des générations de 2007 ou 2006 ou 2005 avec le *kilalaka*, ils ont créé une danse un peu bizarre, ils ont créé d'une certaine façon une chorégraphie à partir de son style, comme Tsilivy (il montre). Ça, ça existe... »

Jenny : « Bizarre dans quel sens pour vous ? »

Ratovo : « Le bizarre c'est... c'est comme une créativité, mais c'est propre façon... On danse pas comme ça avant, mais ça c'est une créativité, une révélation... »

Jenny : « Une créativité qui va dans la direction que malgache ou influencée par... »

Ratovo : « Influencée par les Africains, d'autres influencées par les Africains, d'autres influencés... à partir des vidéos, tout ça... tout ça, je pense qu'il y a une partie influencée par des vidéos, des clips internationales. Surtout des Africains... Avant, on ne danse pas comme ça. » (Interview Ratovo, 26.7.2008)

Choreographer Ariry explains a new project in which he wants to create something inspired by the music of the ancestors and “traditional dances.” For him this also implies that it is always related to the particular Malagasy rhythmical structure of binaries and ternaries:

[60] « C'est pas que moi je vais coder la danse traditionnelle de mes ancêtres, mais je vais essayer de créer une danse qui est codée à partir de la danse traditionnelle, ça s'inspire de la danse traditionnelle. Donc, c'est pourquoi c'est toujours lié au rythme. J'aime toujours toujours toujours les binaires et ternaires et tout ça ! » (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

In summary, as already seen in the discussion of the previous topoi and as the statements of the musicians here confirm; the musicians regard dance as something inseparable from music. Similar to the other topoi, different aspects concerning dance appear in the

musicians' discourses. Dance is depicted as an everyday activity and is also closely linked to the environment, as there are for example dances which are inspired by the movements of the zebu cows. In terms of inspiration for dances or its developments, two directions are mentioned: the influences from outside Madagascar as for instance from the African mainland or from the Western world (mainly through music videos), and the influences or inspiration from within Madagascar, for example from the ancestors as choreographer Ariry describes his new project. In this context, the structure of binaries and ternaries in Malagasy music comes into play. The specificity of the Malagasy rhythm is mentioned by many musicians and with regard to dance, they suggest several characteristics of this rhythmical structure or '6/8 rhythm,' such as its flexibility and openness, its ability to make people dance or that it is easily adaptable to other rhythms. Regional differences seem not to play a very important role, neither is dance particularly emphasised as a unifying element (as compared to language).

#### Influences from outside

Although the tendency throughout all these topoi about the origin and meaning of 'rhythm' is the rootedness in Madagascar and Malagasy culture, some musicians make some rather vague assumptions about influences from abroad or intercultural encounters in history that have made their impact on the music and rhythm in particular.

Interestingly, these assumptions are often followed by the explicit explanation that the Malagasy rhythm had its particularities or was maybe not completely the result of outside influences. The most common idea, however, is that the rhythm "comes from everywhere" as much as Malagasy people say about themselves that they come from everywhere.<sup>82</sup>

Jaobjoby explains that Malagasy people came from all the different continents and brought the rhythm with them. He is eager to emphasise that he is not a historian himself:

[61] "Les Malgaches, ils viennent d'Afrique, de l'Asie, ou de l'Arabie, de l'Inde et même aujourd'hui il y a des métisse de l'Europe, de l'Occident, comme tu dis. Voilà déjà. Donc, les Malgaches sont arrivés ici avec ce rythme. Moi je ne suis pas historien, donc, je fais déjà une réserve. » (Interview Jaobjoby, 21.8.2008)

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<sup>82</sup> This idea was often expressed in many of the interviews I conducted, but also in many conversations I had with people in an everyday context. For an overview of the history of the different waves of immigration in Madagascar's history, please see Brown (1979).

Rajery's idea follows up on Jaojoby's explanation. He describes the particularity of the Malagasy '6/8 rhythm' and emphasises that it is something extremely rich because of the many different influences. Likewise Jaojoby, he also stresses that he is not an academic and an expert on this:

[62] « En fait, d'après tout ce que j'ai vécu, tout ce que j'ai vu et tout ce que je sais, je suis pas ethnomusicologue, mais c'est vraiment riche, parce que c'est mélangé des différentes origines, je pense. Parce que là, le 6/8 on trouve aussi en Afrique, au Maroc, au Mali, donc, c'est extrêmement riche, mais on a notre particularité quand même. » (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

Ratovo on the one hand very much emphasises the mixture of cultures in Madagascar and speaks of an "influence planetos" and a "metamorphose of rhythms" that has come to Madagascar during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as European rhythms (for example the waltz), or Brazilian rhythms. On the other hand, he also stresses the particularity of Malagasy rhythm as he argues that there are also rhythms "that have not been influenced":

[63] Ratovo : « Mais il y a une influence planetos, c'est là... il y a une influence planetos, même si dans l'île, ils se sentent qu'une autre musique, même si c'est impor... il y a d'autres musiques, parce qu'il y a une métamorphose, métamorphose, je dis, des musiques. Des, des... les... c'est quoi la musique de l'Afrique... l'Afrique... qui joue des styles... des rythmes, des rythmes très... comme des Zoulous ou... non, les Malgaches, non, mais il y a des styles qui est lié à des rythmes malgaches. Parce qu'on a des Zoulous qui étaient déjà ici à Madagascar, ils ont pensé, les enfants c'est ici. »

Jenny: « Ça veut dire, vous voulez dire que le rythmique est surtout aussi influencé par des rythmiques africains ? »

Ratovo : « Oui oui. Il y a une partie qui est influencée, il y a d'autres influencées par des Brésiliens, par des... Il y a déjà une métamorphose de rythme qui arrive à Madagascar maintenant, dans le 20<sup>ième</sup> siècle. Mais par avant il y a des rythmes qui n'est pas influencés par des... par les autres Africains... Mais quand même, 1800, vers 1800 je pense, il y a déjà des étrangers européens qui arrivent à Madagascar, qui ont déjà apporté le valse. Donc, c'est là qui commence le... surtout dans les Hauts Plateaux, ils ont utilisé des rythmes de valse. Mais les rythmes très traditionnels, pas des valses. » (Interview Ratovo, 26.7.2008)

However, not all musicians regard these influences as something that has enriched the Malagasy rhythm. To some musicians at least, this vast amount of different influences grounded in the island's history as well as present influences from abroad almost seem like a danger which the Malagasy rhythm has to fight against. Jean-Claude explains that there will always be areas in Madagascar to which no foreign influences will find their

way. This is reminiscent of the topos of everyday life in which many of the musicians show their identification and sympathy with the rural population of Madagascar. He therefore speaks of the strength and the survival of this rhythm. In his example, the national electricity company of Madagascar symbolises the influences that the rhythm faces. He argues that there are still remote parts in Madagascar without electricity which implies that foreign influences will not reach these areas:

[64] « Moi je pense que ce rythme malgache est suffisamment fort, suffisamment ancré que même s'il y a des influences extérieures, elle va survivre, elle va vivre. Elle va vibrer toujours. Et ces influences, au contraire, vont enrichir ce rythme. Mais la base elle est là. Et si tu regardes la « Jirama », comme disait Ricky, « Jirama » assure 18 % en électricité de la population de Madagascar. Ça veut dire qu'avec les 18 % il y a toujours des délestages. Donc, la population elle n'a pas à s'inquiéter de la perte du 6/8, parce que dans les villages, des coins de Madagascar, il n'y a pas d'électricité. Donc, on joue des instruments traditionnels et on joue cette musique traditionnelle, donc le 6/8 est là, en permanence. Donc, on doit pas avoir peur. » (Interview Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

In summary, the musicians' ideas about influences from abroad and the history of the country or of the rhythm respectively, are rather vague. However, the emphasis on the Malagasy rhythm's particularity is explicit and therefore stresses difference towards the outside world. This is also mirrored in allusions to the Malagasy '6/8 rhythm' being in danger (because of influences from outside) or in the statement that there are however rhythms on the island that have not been influenced at all. Again, different regions do not seem to play a role or at least differences in terms of historical events or influences are not mentioned with regard to specific regions. The rhythm is rather again experienced as a pan-Malagasy and unifying element.

#### Emotions and spiritual ideas

The last topos embraces ideas and assumptions that deal with emotions and spirituality. Again, I want to emphasise that the division into these different topoi is not always evident as there are so many interconnecting elements. Especially regarding emotions within musical experiences, one often encounters symbols or metaphors that people use to embrace these emotional aspects as the example of the Kaluli people again shows. Feld (1981) explains:

“*Sa* can stand alone to mean ‘waterfall,’ can prefix verbs of sound making and textual organization. As it generally stands for ‘waterfall’ in its usual context, it generally stands for intervals of the descending minor third in sound terminology. This is found in the calls of the fruitdoves, and stands alone as a symbol of sadness, isolation, and loss” (Feld 1981: 30).

Sadness is also inherent in the music in another way as Feld further explains that for the Kaluli people weeping and shedding tears often form part of the music itself as they “weep in the melody” (Feld 1981: 28). Many Malagasy musicians regard rhythm as something to do with or even based on ‘feeling.’ Whereas some rather consider aspects of communication and reflect upon a more general ‘Malagasy soul,’ others rather emphasise the personal and sensitive aspect to it. I will pick up the aspect of personality and individuality again in the next chapter as according to my own musical experiences, the *lova-tsofina* as such already implies or even in itself is something very individual and personal.

Following up on the two previous topoi, the topos of dance and that of influences from abroad, Justin Vali makes a statement on the spirituality of Malagasy rhythm. In his explanation he uses opposing features, such as ‘body and soul,’ ‘rhythm and melody,’ and ‘Africa and Asia.’ As a result of the voyages of the Malagasy ancestors, he sees a combination of two sides in Malagasy music. He associates Africa with rhythm and body<sup>83</sup> and Asia with melody and soul:

[65] « Je pense que ça c’est le fait des voyages des ancêtres malgaches qui étaient partis de loin, qui passent par l’Afrique et qui viennent de l’Indonésie ou l’Asie et ils passent par l’Afrique après, arriver ici à Madagascar. Parce que moi, je pense qu’il y a le 6/8. Si on écoute ça, c’est vraiment le rythme spirituel. Mais le rythme qui est très posé par l’Afrique, on est là aussi, les racines africaines. On est là aussi, les racines asiennes, indonésiens. Et moi je pense que c’est à cause de ça que le 6/8 était créé, parce qu’en même temps, c’est spirituel. Mais en même temps, il est corps quoi, rythmique aussi. (...) Parce que quand on écoute les musiques africaines, par exemple, c’est vrai que ça fait danser. C’est le corps qui manifeste tout de suite. C’est le corps qui manifeste. Mais quand écoute ici un peu la musique malgache, c’est vrai qu’il y a une mélodie qui suit le rythme. Donc, on se rappelle quand même qu’il y a la mélodie asiatique là dedans, les côtés asiatiques. Mais on a aussi le rythme. En même temps, on a aussi le rythme. Ça se prouve que les ancêtres malgaches, il fait voyager, on part l’Afrique et on arrive ici à Madagascar. (...) Voilà. C’est la combinaison de les deux, je pense,

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<sup>83</sup> Justin’s idea mirrors Agawu’s critique that Africa is always associated with rhythm which I have discussed in detail in section 1; see Agawu (2003).

qui crée vraiment notre rythme ici. C'est un petit peu en l'air et spirituel, en l'air mais pas vraiment posé quelquefois. Parce que les musiciens, quand ils jouent le 6/8, le rythme était en l'air. » (Interview Justin Vali, 23.11.2007)

Feld (1981) also mentions the image of “in the air” in Kaluli theory on music as for them, all composition starts with melody and this melody is always “‘in the air’ with the sound of the birds, or actually vocalized as one sings a melody” (Feld 1981: 29).

Erick Manana, however, explained to me that the Malagasy musicians' use of the image of the rhythm being “in the air” derives from the image of tapping feet and that for *vazahas* the strong beat in Malagasy music always seem to be in the moment the musicians' tapping foot is up.<sup>84</sup> I will come back to discussions of strong and weak beats and the musicians' experiences of intercultural musical encounters in the next chapter.

Interesting again, is the relation mentioned to other topoi, such as the environment. Samy similarly to Justin takes up the idea of Madagascar as a place where different ‘worlds’ emerge and describes it from a very positive point of view, namely the ‘6/8 rhythm’ as a synthesis of a successful “melting pot” of cultures. A reason for this, he says, is the ability of Malagasy people to easily learn by ear and adapt to any kind of new musical styles and situations in general:

[66] « Parce que moi personnellement je me tiens encore l'idée que Madagascar, c'est une zone de convergence de la civilisation, c'est une zone tampon donc. Et c'est pour ça que les Malgaches en réalité arrivent très très facilement à s'adapter. Et la réponse au 6/8, c'est justement ça. (...) Non, c'est parce que les Malgaches peuvent s'adapter à créer à partir de cette, de faire la synthèse en réalité de civilisations, de tempos, de tempéraments et tout ça pour créer, et c'est ça que Tsilav a dit la dernière fois, c'est un « melting-pot » réussi en réalité. Et tout le monde se retrouve ici. Les Malgaches ont une facilité étonnante d'oreille musicale, de s'adapter à tous les types de musique et à toutes les situations. C'est ça. Et le 6/8 c'est justement la synthèse de tout ça. » (Interview Samy, 7.12.2007)

He further mentions the different influences and fusions from different continents and nations that have shaped the rhythm in Madagascar and explains that rhythm has a very spiritual aspect to it which he thinks is based on “Oriental cultures”:

[67] Samy: « Ça c'est, il faut... à mon avis, il faut chercher ça à partir de la fusion malayo-polynésienne et africaine. Parce que avec l'histoire de peuplement ce qu'on a dit tout à l'heure, il y avait donc, les Africains, et après l'arrivée de malayo-polynésien, il y avait les Africains arabisés, islamistes donc. Après... ce sont des

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<sup>84</sup> Discussion with Erick Manana, 17.10.2010.

grandes tendances, moi, je parle pas des Indiens, des Chinois (il rit). Il y a l'arrivée des Européens. Et ainsi de suite. Ça, c'est l'aspect rythmique, ça c'est l'aspect spirituel, la dimension spirituelle de la musique. »

Jenny : « C'est quoi par exemple ? »

Samy : « La dimension spirituelle, c'est un peu l'Orient quoi. Si tu fais l'étude sur la culture orientale, c'est... il y a cet aspect spirituel. » (Interview Samy, 24.11.2007)

Bilo also shares the idea that Madagascar is shaped by different cultures. However, when asked why they all shared the same rhythm, as he had argued before, he said that he was not sure. He describes Madagascar as a “country of colours” and a “globe” which is formed by all the different cultures:

[68] « Là... je sais pas à cause de quoi. (Il rit) Mais ce que je sais, tu vois nous les Malgaches, on... on est un pays des couleurs. Tu vois, on trouve toute la couleur. Moi, je sais pas, même jusqu'à maintenant d'où vient la racine malgache, parce qu'on est dans une île. Peut-être ça vient de l'Afrique, peut-être ça vient de l'Europe. Il y a des Européens, il y a des Asiatiques, il y a partout et ça se forme dans un globe qui s'appelle Madagascar, tu vois ? (Il rit) » (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

Despite or maybe also exactly because of all these mixtures, influences and fusions that people mention and reflect upon, many musicians tend to emphasise the “Malagasy soul” that one needs in order to play and understand this music and the Malagasy rhythm in particular. I have had the experience myself that I was often told that I would never be able to fully understand the music or play it exactly as Malagasy people do as there was always the “Malagasy soul” that would be missing. Some, however, encouraged me that if I continued to play with Malagasy musicians and stayed a long time in Madagascar, learnt the language properly, listened to many musics etc, I might have the chance to learn it. I will explain my own musical experiences and also the musicians' reactions towards it in more detail in the next chapter.

However, even regarding the ‘soul’ musicians have different opinions, as for instance Ratovo who sees ‘soul’ as something related to ethnicity, and not only as a ‘unifying factor’ for all Malagasies people. However, what all Malagasies share is the feeling of a certain sadness and melancholy grounded in the fact of living on an island. So when being abroad, Malagasies tend to show solidarity towards their compatriots, also from other regions:



[69] Ratovo : “Ça c’est... j’ai pas l’idée tellement l’idée ça vient d’où, parce que je pense que l’âme malgache, l’âme je dis... il y a toute une âme très différente... dans l’ethnie, je pense l’ethnie... chaque ethnie a sa façon d’exprimer l’âme. Parce qu’il y a ... même si c’est quand même solidaire, solidaire, parce que c’est une île. Donc, il y a toujours une mélancolie qui est basée de tout ça.

Jenny : « Mélancolie ? »

Ratovo : « Mélancolie, la tristesse d’être une île. On est très solidaire. C’est là que se repose tout le temps les Malgaches. Pourquoi ? Parce que quand on allé de loin, c’est en Angleterre ou en Allemagne ou quelque part, on se reconnaît quand on rencontre, même si d’autres musiques de l’Est, de l’Est de Tamatave, du Sud, eh ? On se reconnaît que c’est notre musique, même si c’est l’âme de l’Est ou l’âme des Hauts Plateaux. » (Interview Ratovo, 26.7.2008)

Ratovo also mentions another aspect of ‘soul.’ The ‘soul’ can be the propulsive element while playing music. When doing recordings, for example, people sometimes do not play exactly on the beat as their soul does not work according to strict timing:

[70] Ratovo : « Et c’est là, le problème malgache! Même moi, je me sens très bien, mal à l’aise à partir de... Il y a des moments forts de l’âme, il y a des sentiments... Même si c’était carré, je ne respecte pas le carré (il rit). Je me pose la question... Il y a toujours quand on fait des enregistrements, ça c’est une faute grave, mais c’est pas une faute grave ça, mais c’est l’âme qui me pousse... à aller au-delà ! C’est pas le mesure qui manque, s’il manque quelquefois ou ça dépasse, c’est pas *juste* sur le... »

Jenny : « Beat ? »

Ratovo : « Sur le tempo (il tape le pied). » (Interview Ratovo, 26.7.2008)

Ratovo’s idea that the ‘soul’ is the driving force when playing music goes more into the direction of regarding rhythm as something very personal. The choreographer Ariry speaks of an “interior rhythm.” When creating choreographies it is not always the music that pushes him towards new movements, but often this “interior rhythm” and what he calls “already lived rhythms”:

[71] « Bien sûr que des fois j’utilise pas des supports musicaux pour mes chorégraphies, mais je pense que c’est le rythme intérieur et le souvenir des différents rythmes que moi, j’ai vécu à coté et tout ça qui me poussent à faire des mouvements. » (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

Ricky, on the one hand, describes a very personal side of rhythm. Everyone has his or her own rhythm and it is therefore a question of sensibility:

[72] « Oui oui et là, Jenny, je ne parle pas de techniques par rapport à ça. 6/8, 3/4, 4/4, 12/8... Ça, moi je trouve que c’est le fait du rythme, chaque personne, chaque

individu a son rythme. Et ça c'est une question de sensibilité et cette sensibilité qui explique, qui explique vraiment le rythme. » (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

On the other hand, he also sees a universal side of rhythm. He regards the '6/8 rhythm' as a universal one. However, what makes the difference is the sensibility towards this rhythm:

[73] « Mais moi, je pense que c'est universel. Comme Santana fait, quand il joue le 6/8, c'est 6/8, c'est universel. Mais la sensibilité, c'est ça qui est différente. C'est ça qui est différente, la sensibilité, parce que c'est... là, on ne parle pas de technique, là on parle vraiment.... de respiration, tu vois ? » (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

For Ricky, rhythm is always about communication which also relates to sensibility. He explains that there is something to rhythm which one just cannot explain. He defines rhythm as the "communication within human sensibility" for which he gives a few examples. When playing, it is often via looks that he communicates with other musicians. They do not need to talk and are still able to understand each other. The fact that Santana dreams of coming to Madagascar in order to understand the rhythm Ricky interprets in the way that Santana is searching for this spiritual aspect of sensibility and communication:

[74] « Oui, mais moi, Jenny, je te dis que "ça sonne pas malgache", c'est faux ! Mais ça rentre pas dans la sensibilité, parce que le rythme, dès que tu l'as, tu peux faire tout ce que tu veux, même avec un Brésilien, même avec... Je sais pas quoi ! Mais c'est une question vraiment complicité, sensibilité et ça c'est le rythme quoi. Et c'est ça qui définit le rythme. Quand je... même moi, quand je joue avec lui, on fait comme ça et on se comprend et là, toi tu regardes, mais toi tu comprends pas, mais ça veut dire quoi ça ? Pourquoi ils se regardent par rapport à ce rythme là ? Mais nous, on se regarde comme ça... regarde, tu vois ? On se regarde et des fois on fait tout le temps comme ça (il montre), on joue dans des grands festivals en Suisse, en Allemagne, on fait les trucs comme (il montre) et on se regarde et on se comprend. On se comprend, mais on n'arrive pas à s'expliquer (il rit)... C'est quoi ce regard-là ? On se comprend, mais on n'arrive pas à s'expliquer et là, pour toi c'est vraiment important d'expliquer ça dans tes recherches que le rythme là-bas, c'est... spirituel quoi ! Moi je pense comme ça. C'est spirituel. Et peut-être c'est à cause de ça que Santana, peut-être il voulait vraiment venir pour sentir les choses, parce qu'on n'arrive pas à expliquer ça. (...) C'est ça. Et le rythme c'est vraiment la communication dans la sensibilité humaine. Définition (il rit) ! Ça, c'est ma définition. (tout le monde rit) Si on arrive à se communiquer... Moi, une fois j'ai joué... parce qu'on parle tout le temps, mais on joue pas. Mais un jour j'ai dit à Jean-Claude, on va jouer ! Comme ça, eh ? Et là, on est resté, on est resté, parce que tu vois, c'est comme ça. » (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

Ricky also once mentioned in a discussion with Jean-Claude and me that he considers the heart as the “centre of rhythm.”<sup>85</sup> Reacting to this idea by Ricky, Jean-Claude during our discussion suddenly remembered an anecdote from his tript to the *Mikea* forest with a group of Italians. He told us that when these Italians listened to the music from the *Mikea* people for the first time, they were surprised, especially by the rhythm that they had never heard before. After thinking and listening for a very long time, one of them apparently said that he had finally found out to what this rhythm corresponds to: namely the heart beat. Jean-Claude therefore resumed:

[75] « Ou alors, c’est le rythme cardiaque pris d’émotion, là on va en 6/8. (Tout le monde rit) » (Interview Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

In summary, the musicians’ statements about emotional aspects or spirituality of rhythm almost seem like explanations or even answers to the very vague ideas that some musicians expressed about influences from abroad and the historical development of this rhythmical structure. These influences are this time rather described positively as Madagascar is depicted for instance as a “melting pot réussit en réalité,” or as a “synthesis of civilisation” to which the ‘6/8 rhythm’ is the overall answer. Again, the debate on sameness and difference that draws through the musicians’ discourses is striking. It touches upon different levels – from very individual and personal ideas, to more general statements. For the first time within all these topoi, sameness is emphasised also across the borders of Madagascar as the universality of the ‘6/8 rhythm’ is stressed. Further, the idea that rhythm at the end is something very personal and that everyone has his or her own individual rhythm is also pointing at sameness as the musicians do not distinguish Malagasy from non-Malagasy people at this point, nor do they point at any regional particularities. The metaphor of the ‘soul’ also passes throughout this debate and appears at different levels. Interestingly it functions as a pointer to sameness as well as to difference. Whereas many musicians carry the idea of a ‘Malagasy soul’ that is also necessary to fully understand and properly play this music or rhythm in particular, others speak of the ‘soul’ that is different in each ethnic group. Others again tend to emphasise the individuality, as for instance expressed in terms such as ‘interior rhythm.’ Difference is therefore created between Madagascar and the outside world, between different ethnic

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<sup>85</sup> Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008.

groups and also between all individual persons. However, at the same time it also means that sameness is expressed within Madagascar and individuality can also be understood in the way that all human beings are the same.

### Conclusion

The analysis of the musicians' own theories on the origin and meaning of rhythm in Madagascar has opened up a broad palette of topics and debates which shows that rhythm is understood, explained and experienced in many different ways. I have identified different subject areas or 'recurring topoi' within the musicians' discourses through which they conceptualise 'rhythm' and that all relate to the concept of oral tradition, the *lova-tsofina*. These topoi that, except one, are all rooted within Madagascar itself are the environment, everyday life, language, dance, influences from outside, and emotional/spiritual ideas. Although the division into these different topoi has been the base for my analysis, they are in fact all closely interrelated. Further, they should also be seen as very broad groupings as they all touch upon very different aspects within the topos. Environment, for example, deals with the physical environment as well as with the people's relation and their movements within the environment. Language does not only compass speaking habits, but also the musicians' theories on the actual structure of their language, or the role of language as song lyrics.

Questions of identity are negotiated throughout the musicians' discourses on the origin and meaning of 'rhythm.' This is expressed in a constant debate on sameness and difference that draws through all the topoi. However, this debate takes on different shapes as it appears on various levels. Comparisons are made between different regions in Madagascar, such as between the High Plateaux area and the Coastal regions, between Madagascar and the African mainland, or between Madagascar and the Western world. Here, looking at the different topoi reveals that identities and feelings of belonging are expressed differently: Whereas the topos of language in particular, but also the topoi of everyday life and dance are rather experienced as shared elements that emphasise a pan-Malagasy identity, within the topos of environment the musicians often distinguish regional specificities. However, the topos of environment at the same time also supports the idea of the 'same groove' everywhere on the island and therefore compares

Madagascar as a whole with the 'rest' of the world. Musicians also often create images of what they consider typically Malagasy. Especially in the topos of everyday life it is striking that all musicians, despite their bond to capital Antananarivo, very much identify with a rural countryside lifestyle. This also explains the persistent appearance of two themes, namely of the zebu cows and the rice, be it as metaphors or in relation to activities, such as ploughing the rice fields.

The topos of influences from abroad, again, stresses the particularity of the Malagasy rhythm in general, although expressed in rather vague ideas about historical developments and influences. The biggest balancing act between difference and sameness can probably be seen in the musicians' statements about emotional aspects concerning rhythm. The idea or even metaphor of a 'Malagasy soul' again creates a rather pan-Malagasy feeling of belonging and a rather evident expression of exclusion in the way that musicians claim that in order to understand and play this rhythm, you actually need to have this 'Malagasy soul.' On the other hand, 'soul' is understood as something very personal and associated with an 'interior rhythm' that actually all human beings have. Sameness is therefore also, for the only time, expressed between Madagascar and the outside world.

I will come back and refer back to many aspects of these topoi and the musicians' experiences in the following chapter. There, I will focus on my own and yet *shared* musical experiences, giving concrete examples of how I have linked discourses and musical practices and how I have analysed the interrelation of both.

### Chapter 3.3 - Experiencing Rhythm

- Introduction
- The musical experience of 'rhythm'
  - Composing and 'malagasising' tunes
  - Tapping feet, counting, and clapping
  - Intercultural musical encounters - examples of musicians' experiences
- Participating musically myself
- The interrelation of discourses and musical experiences
- Examples:
  - The importance of the *lova-tsofina*
  - '6/8 rhythm' and the *opportunity* of binaries and ternaries
  - Engaging in 'malagasising' music
  - The importance of language and lyrics
  - The importance of the instrument and its playing technique
  - The emphasis on personality/individuality in Malagasy music
- Outlook / further research possibilities
- Conclusion

#### Introduction

In the previous two chapters I have focused on the analysis of discourses, first by looking at the musicians' discourses on the specific term and concept of '6/8 rhythm,' and second, by exploring the concept of *lova-tsofina* and the origin and meaning of 'rhythm' in Madagascar in the musicians' own discussions.

In this last chapter of section 3 the focus will be on musical experiences. I will first come back briefly to the continuing debate within ethnomusicology on the demand for a more performative approach (e.g. Baily 2008) and to the musicians' own view as to the necessity for engaging musically and learning to play the music. Musicians often express

their difficulties in talking about and expressing musical experience, thus mirroring the scholarly debate discussed analysed in chapter 2.2. However, instead of regarding musicking and talking about music as two almost separable worlds, I argue that discourses and musical experience need to be analysed in a constant interrelation. This I will demonstrate with concrete examples in the second part of this chapter. This chapter is therefore also closely linked with the previous chapters of this section in which I focused on discourses.

I will analyse the musicians' discourses on their musical experiences, particularly of how they experience 'rhythm' while musicking. Here, I will look at three topics that persistently come up in the musicians' discourses: 1. composing and 'malagasising' music; 2. tapping feet, counting, and clapping; and 3. intercultural musical encounters. The second part of the chapter focuses on my own and yet *shared* musical experiences. I will give various examples of how discourses and musical experiences interrelate and how I have analysed both interdependently. I will therefore also link back to topoi and aspects that came up in the analyses presented in the previous chapters and in the first part of this chapter.

Having argued for and demonstrated the importance of integrating musical practices into ethnomusicological research, I will point out possible further research concerning Malagasy music and ethnomusicological research in general. Finally, I will present a short outlook on how within ethnomusicology the integration of musical practices and performance into research has led scholars to broaden and open up the methodological horizon for further (interdisciplinary) research areas.

### The musical experience of 'rhythm'

In chapter 2.2 I have described the on-going discussion within ethnomusicology that there is a need for more performative research (e.g. Baily 2008). The need and importance to participate musically is also a topic raised by the musicians themselves. During my work with Malagasy musicians, many of them often explained to me that the only way to learn and understand Malagasy music was to play it. Various musicians express their regrets that it was always non-musicians writing about and explaining their

music whereas musicians themselves were unable to explain or write about their music.<sup>86</sup> Thus, for the musicians, musical experiences seem to be very important and they see a need for me to participate musically in order to understand their music. At the same time, many of the musicians also express a difficulty of describing their musical experiences in words. This mirrors the scholarly debate on the discrepancy between discourses about music and experiences of musicking as outlined in chapter 2.2. With regard to the previous discussion about the integration of our musical experience into our research, however, it is necessary to ask to what extent we can integrate other people's musical experiences as well. Here, I would like to refer back to Baily's argument that understanding music as a performer gives you a large area of common experience (Baily 2001: 96). This idea of a common or shared experience takes us back to methodological discussions presented in section 2. Learning the music by playing together with other musicians does not only provide you with your own experience of that very moment of musicking, but also creates a *shared* experience of some sort. Rice, for example, argues that experience needs to be understood as something that "begins with interaction with a world and with others" (Rice 2003: 157). He speaks of a *shared* space of musical experience that encompasses the researcher as well as the researched (Rice 2003: 173-174). As already argued in section 2, for me this supports Agawu's suggestion of a "*presumption* of sameness" within research, i.e. a state of mind or attitude of the researcher that presumes sameness rather than difference from the beginning (Agawu 2003: 171). In other words, through my musical participation I have gained shared experiences with the Malagasy musicians. This does not merely happen through the fact of playing music together, but also through a certain attitude and idea of sameness: by this I mean that our shared musicking or my learning of Malagasy music did not have the aim of finding differences and comparing each other's musics (although definitely the recognition of differences can be part of learning processes and shared experiences as well). Presuming sameness, as Agawu argues, is not so much a method, but a way of seeing the world. Musical experience within research could therefore simply be seen as a musical encounter between musicians who share common experiences of musicking.

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<sup>86</sup> This argument appeared in various conversations and discussions. It was intensively discussed in my conversation with Rija Randrianivosoa, Erick Manana, and Rivo Razafindramanitra before our concert in Poitiers, France, 22.1.2010.



With regard to social aspects and my role as a researcher, the fact of meeting and experiencing ‘between musicians’ rather than between researcher and musicians (or ‘researched’) is also of crucial importance. The musical experience that I share with the musicians has also had an influence on our discourses and discussions. It is this idea of reciprocity between musical experience and discourse as well as performance and analysis that actually favours and supports a “*presumption of sameness.*”

Still, technically speaking I am to some extent limited as I only have the musicians’ discourses on their musical experiences as a concrete (tangible) source for my analysis. However, these discourses are informed by the musicians’ musical experiences – which are also *shared* experiences - and as argued above, this should be regarded as a reciprocal process, rather than only as an insuperable obstacle within music analysis. The discourses I will analyse in this chapter focus on *musical* experiences, such as for example the musicians’ attempts to explain what they felt musically or also how they technically try to explain what they do when they musick.

Especially in the musicians’ technical explanations, the term ‘6/8 rhythm’ appears quite often which allows me to come back and refer back to the discussions of chapter 3.1.

In the following I will look at three topics that consistently come up in the musicians’ discourses and that directly concern their musical experiences: 1.) Musicians very often reflect upon their own ways of composing and many of them have an interest in musically ‘malagasising’ already existing tunes and songs. 2.) Tapping feet, counting, and clapping to music are activities that musicians seem to especially concentrate on. This is closely related to the third topic as it is especially these activities that are often the cause of musical (mis-)understanding as well as debates on 3.) intercultural musical encounters. Throughout the musicians’ discourses on these topics of their musical experiences, identity is a key issue and different questions of identity come to the fore. As in the last two chapters I will particularly focus on the musicians’ perception of ‘Self’ and ‘Other,’ as well as on shifting identities, such as individual vs. collective identity, regional vs. collective, or Malagasy vs. African vs. Western.

### Composing and ‘malagasising’ tunes

During the interviews musicians seemed to be very keen to explain their own personal ways of composing music. Within their reflections upon this topic, a certain trend came to the fore: to ‘malagasise’ already existing music or songs or in other words, to create a Malagasy version of foreign musical tunes.

Talking about composing, but even more so talking about ‘malagasising’ music, musicians constantly refer to identity issues, such as drawing clear boundaries between Malagasy and non-Malagasy, which I will analyse in the examples below. Further, these first examples of the musicians’ discourses on their musical experiences already show that, again, ‘rhythm’ is a topic that constantly reoccurs and matters to the musicians. The first example that I would like to present in detail is from a discussion I had with *valiha* player Rajery. He often mentioned to me that he very much appreciates and likes *tsapiky* music, which has its origin in South-Western Madagascar, in the region of Tuléar.<sup>87</sup> In one of the interviews with him, we talked about his album “Sofera”<sup>88</sup> and how he had worked on the opening song “Tandremo.” In this song, he makes use of *tsapiky* music in a very particular way, i.e. by creating a very personal version of it. The title “Tandremo” in Malagasy means “Caution” and addresses young people in particular. The song is a warning to the youth to always reflect and think well before doing something in life. This theme of the song had been the starting point for Rajery’s composition. He explains that based on the idea to reach the Youth and pass on a message, he had searched for the right rhythm. He decided for the *tsapiky* as it resembles reggae music, especially if you reduce the tempo just a little bit. He is convinced that young people are attracted by rather festive music, such as reggae. When first hearing the song, listeners will think that it is reggae whereas it is actually *tsapiky* music. However, Rajery also points out that he and his musicians have their very own way of playing *tsapiky* which is different to the way it is played in its region of origin. In fact, they are not able to play *tsapiky* in its original way. The differences lie in the melodies of the guitar and their singing style. What stays the same is the “rhythmic root.” Rajery also

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<sup>87</sup> Detailed analyses of *tsapiky* music can be found in the works of French ethnomusicologists Julien Mallet. See Mallet (2000, 2004, 2007, 2008, and 2009).

<sup>88</sup> Rajery (2007): *Sofera*. France, Marabi Productions, MARABI 46820.2.

mentions that some listeners might be reminded of South African music when hearing the song. He therefore describes the song as a kind of musical journey:

[76] Rajery : « Donc, comment faire pour créer le rythme déjà ? Parce qu'il y a le thème. C'est pour dire aux jeunes : attention ! Donc il faut réfléchir avant de faire quelque chose. Donc, pour attirer l'attention des jeunes, pour que le message soit passé, donc quel rythme ? Quel tempérament ? Donc, ça c'est tout un travail. Donc là, j'ai choisi le tsapiky, mais en écoutant au premier, tu sens que "Ah, c'est un reggae ça !" Tu vois ? Mais effectivement si on fait le dérivé de tsapiky ou si on diminue un petit peu le tempo, c'est du reggae. Oui, c'est incroyable ! Mais nous, on se rendait pas compte quand on a travaillé cette musique, on a fait comme ça et après... (...) En fait, parce que là, tu sais... les jeunes ils adorent les trucs un peu festifs, tu vois ? Qui bougent, en majorité, tu vois ? Les jeunes, ils ont besoin de ça. Et là, on a travaillé le tsapiky. En première partie de la chanson, on se dit que bon, les gens ils vont croire que c'est du reggae. Mais déjà, la manière de jouer la guitare, c'est pas du reggae. Des fois aussi tu sens que "Ah, c'est du Sud-Af. !" Donc, tu vois ? C'est du voyage. Mais le fond de la chanson c'est du tsapiky. (Il montre) Ça, c'est le tsapiky. Mais il y a aussi une chose qui le dit que nous, on peut pas faire le tsapiky comme ils l'ont fait les musiciens du Sud. Donc, nous, on fait le tsapiky à notre manière à nous. »

Jenny : « Et c'est quoi la différence si on compare ça avec le tsapiky au Sud ? »

Rajery : « En fait, la différence, c'est par exemple, c'est la mélodie de la guitare. »

Jenny : « Mais le rythme est le même ? »

Rajery : « Le rythme est le même. »

Jenny : « La différence est peut-être dans la mélodie... »

Rajery : « Dans la mélodie. Parce que là tu sais, les chanteurs du tsapiky, c'est pas comme je fais. C'est pas pareil. Mais on a essayé de garder cette racine rythmique. Que ce rythme c'est du tsapiky quoi. (...) Donc, c'est notre manière aussi de montrer le tsapiky, de jouer le tsapiky. Donc, c'est nous, d'après notre petite analyse, notre petite recherche quoi. Parce qu'on ne peut pas faire pareil comme ils ont fait. Parce que nous aussi, on aimerait bien créer quelque chose, chercher quelque chose de nouveaux. Mais ça reste toujours dans l'esprit de tsapiky. » (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

For Rajery, rhythm plays a very particular and important role within his compositions. As the example of the "Tandremo" song shows, he says that he uses a particular rhythm to underline the message and theme of his song and by choosing this particular rhythm, he adapts the song for a particular audience (young people). At the same time, it becomes clear that 'rhythm' needs to be understood in a wider sense when he speaks of *tsapiky*. By explaining that they created their very own version of *tsapiky* music, it becomes evident that *tsapiky* for him describes everything from guitar playing and singing style, to tempo and rhythmic structure. However, he puts a particular emphasis on the "rhythmic root" of

*tsapiky* which is the only musical feature that they kept of *tsapiky* as it is played in the South. This mirrors many musicians' ideas that there is a common rhythmical structure in Madagascar that all Malagasy people share no matter from which region they come from (see discussions in previous chapters).

In his description of how the composition of the song developed, Rajery points at both, sameness and difference on various levels. He explains that *tsapiky* and reggae music have something in common, a similarity that he plays on and uses to evoke certain musical associations. At the same time, he points out the particularity of *tsapiky* music which lies especially in its tempo. However, with regard to *tsapiky* music, he also draws a clear line between *tsapiky* as played in the South, in its region of origin, and their own version of *tsapiky*, referring to the latter as keeping the "esprit of *tsapiky* music."

Although he emphasises the same rhythmic root of *tsapiky* music, he explains that they are unable to play *tsapiky* like the people in the South. Hence, he points out regional differences within the *tsapiky* regarding singing style (the way of entering the voice for example) and the way of playing the guitar.

A kind of counterpart of Rajery's statement can be found in Mallet's book on *tsapiky* music (Mallet 2009). He analyses how *tsapiky* musicians create a very strong regional identity through their music making, expressing a particular negative feeling or even exclusion towards the capital and the land of the *Merina* people (Mallet 2009: 151). In one of the musicians' statements quoted in Mallet's analysis of the regional identity, the topic of 'rhythm' also comes to the fore. The musician claims that people from other regions are not capable of playing *tsapiky* music correctly:

« ... À Tana par exemple il y a des gens qui étudient le *tsapiky* mais ils n'arrivent pas. La batterie ils arrivent, mais le rythme non, c'est différent. Même à Tamatave ils ont voulu le *tsapiky* mais non... » (quoted in Mallet 2009: 149).<sup>89</sup>

It is striking to see that the musician distinguishes 'rhythm' from what is played on the drum kit in *tsapiky* music, arguing that their rhythm is different to the other regions and also that people from other regions cannot capture the *tsapiky* rhythm. Once again, this points at the necessity to understand 'rhythm' in a wider sense, for example analysing

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<sup>89</sup> "In Tana, for example, there are people who study *tsapiky*, but they don't get it. The drum kit yes, but the rhythm no, it's different. Even in Tamatave they wanted the *tsapiky*, but no..." (my translation)

different musical features as being interrelated and interdependent - a topic I will return to in the last part of this chapter as it has been part of my own musical experiences and part of my learning process.

Rajery's description of his song evoking different kinds of musical journeys while retaining Malagasy or even more particularly *tsapiky* at its base, resembles a general trend among musicians that I have discovered throughout the interviews as well as within my own musical practice and projects with Malagasy musicians: many musicians create Malagasy versions of already existing tunes or 'malagasise' music as they often refer to it. Every time musicians talk about these processes of 'malagasising' music, the topic of 'rhythm' seems to play a crucial role. It is also particularly within these discussions on 'malagasising' tunes or on compositions that regional differences are described or emphasised by the musicians as Rajery's example above shows.

One of the main arguments within the musicians' explanations of 'malagasising' music is that it is about a change of the rhythmic structure, often about adding a ternary rhythmic structure to a binary one or vice versa. Jazz saxophone player Seta is leading the so-called "Tana Gospel Choir." He says that he had realised that people like it very much if they 'malagasise' protestant chants which are normally in a 4/4 metre. Being a jazz musician who is also involved in international and therefore intercultural music projects, he argues that the Malagasy rhythm can easily be integrated into jazz standards.<sup>90</sup> This is exactly one of the recent projects of singer and guitarist Erick Manana. I have been involved in this project and will therefore come back to it in more detail later in this chapter.<sup>91</sup>

Ricky and Jean-Claude told me in our interview that they were planning to record a Malagasy version of a song by Jimmy Hendrix. Jean-Claude immediately came up with the topic of rhythm. However, 'rhythm' needs to be understood again in a wider sense, as for example melodies can be rhythmical as well and enrich the main '6/8 rhythm' as

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<sup>90</sup> Discussion with Seta, 11.12.2007.

<sup>91</sup> It is a common phenomenon that jazz is being taken up by musicians around the world. This has also attracted the interest of researchers. Johnson (2002) develops the notion of a "jazz diaspora" and gives a detailed account of various jazz practices around the world. He argues that jazz "(...) was not 'invented' and then exported. It was invented in the process of being disseminated. As both idea and practice, jazz came into being through negotiation with the vehicles of its dissemination, and with conditions it encountered in any given location" (Johnson 2002: 39). Jazz practices by Malagasy musicians, in Madagascar and by Malagasy musicians abroad, is yet another research field to be explored.

Jean-Claude explains. It is about mixing and combining the main rhythm with for instance “rhythmical melodies” or “riffs”:

[77] « Il y a la guitare, le sax, mais le riff, c’est rythmique. C’est une mélodie qui revient et elle devient rythmique. (...) Les Rolling Stones, quand tu fais (il montre), ça, c’est rythmique. Donc, lorsque on joue une musique dans le 6/8 et on met en plus une mélodie qui est un riff, la rythmique, elle est beaucoup plus riche. Enfin je sais pas (il rit). (...) Une mélodie peut être rythmique et ce qui va aussi enrichir la musique 6/8, c’est la mélodie et le riff qu’on va mettre dessus, elle sera en général dans l’esprit 6/8. Donc, le 6/8 devient encore plus chargé et beaucoup plus riche. » (Interview Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

This mirrors some of my own experiences to which I will return. It never seems to be only about changing the rhythmical structure. Rather, rhythm and melody for example are always highly related and also related very differently according to the different regional styles of Malagasy music with regard to where the strong beats are felt. Hence, it is also about changing the accentuation, playing the right tempo as well as the singing and guitar playing style. Erick Manana, for example, often argues that he mainly creates “High Plateaux” versions of music tunes as this is the region and therefore the musical style from where he originates, claiming that a Malagasy version of the same music by a musician from the South would be completely different. He has given the example that if you gave the same song to ‘malagasise’ to the five musicians of the group “Madagascar AllStars” – all from different areas of the island – you’ll get five completely different, yet Malagasy, versions of it.<sup>92</sup>

To sum up, it is especially in the musicians’ narratives on their compositions and on their projects of ‘malagasising’ music that regional differences, or rather regional particularities within Malagasy music are of great importance to the musicians. At the same time, their references do not only point at the local or regional, but they relate their ideas of regional particularities to the global, for example in talking about ‘global music styles,’ such as jazz or reggae, or in talking about particular musical icons, such as Jimmy Hendrix or the Rolling Stones.

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<sup>92</sup> Erick Manana during a discussion at the TnMundi conference in Southampton, 15-17<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

### Tapping feet, counting, and clapping

The musicians' strong emphasis on regional particularities does not tally with another topic that reoccurred persistently in their narratives on their musical experiences: counting, tapping feet, clapping or any other body movements felt or made while musicking. When discussing these latter topics musicians tend to emphasise the differences between themselves and non-Malagasy people.<sup>93</sup> At the same time, ways of counting while musicking are sometimes described as something very individual and personal as the analysis of the following examples will show.

During one of my research stays in Antananarivo, I spent one afternoon with violin player Samy listening to music – a collection of tunes from all around the island and from different decades that he had put together for me. It had been his idea that we should spend some time listening to these tunes together, as he wanted to show me that often the way of listening to music was already very different between Malagasy and European people, particularly as regards the rhythm and how one would count or clap to the music. Samy always emphasises the structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries in Malagasy music and argues that this is exactly where differences come to the fore: whereas Europeans would often rather hear (and clap to) the binary structure, Malagasy people rather had the ternary structure in mind:

[78] « C'est justement ça que je vais te démontrer là maintenant. (...) 1, 2, 3, 4 quand un Européen écoute ça, il dit 1, 2, 3, 4 alors que nous, dans notre tête, c'est 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6... » (Interview Samy, 7.12.2007)

Rakotomavo also often brought up the topic of overlapping binaries and ternaries in Malagasy music. As already shown in the previous chapter he even has his very own theory of distinguishing a “synthetic metre” from “analytic metre,” the latter being based on the Malagasy language (see chapter 3.2). In one of the interviews he gave an example that resembles Samy's idea shown above; however pointing at the opposite way. He argues here that the French waltz “L'étoile de neige” in Madagascar was typically played in a binary metre:

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<sup>93</sup> This is also a topic raised by many European people, for example during or after concerts of Malagasy music many people recognise and say that they are puzzled as they could not understand nor follow the clapping or tapping of the musicians or the Malagasy audience or that they were always tapping or clapping differently.

[79] « Tu connais la chanson là ? « L'étoile des neiges » ? (Il chante) C'est une valse, mais ici (il chante et clappe à deux temps). Ça se joue à deux temps, ça c'est typiquement malgache ça. » (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

Ricky also talks about the coexistence of binaries and ternaries in Malagasy music and describes it as one of the particularities through which Malagasy music creates difference which then can create harmony. He talks about *Mpihira Gasy* violin, trumpet and accordion player Doné (alias Doné Sahondrafinina) who always automatically joins in any 4/4 piece with a 6/8 rhythm; i.e. he adds the ternary structure to the existing binaries:

[80] « Mais l'influence aussi, l'ouverture, l'influence, ça va expliquer beaucoup de choses. Par exemple, quand on fait des trucs avec Doné, un truc qui est vraiment en 4/4 comme funk ou je sais pas quoi, mais lui il rentre tout de suite en 6/8 sur le 4/4 ! Tu vois ? Et c'est bien, parce que ça nous a donné vraiment une différence, mais cette différence, ça va créer l'harmonie si c'est bien géré. » (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

Within the musicians' discussion on different metres or overlapping rhythmic structures, questions of accentuation and the placement of strong beats seem to be key issues. Ricky first argues that the placement of strong beats in Malagasy music was different to music of the "other side of the ocean," referring to the African mainland. He describes the Malagasy strong beat as always being "up" and draws the relation to Malagasy language and accentuation that is determined by the pronunciation and the sounds of the words (see also chapter 3.2). He gives the example of the word *andrandràina* (meaning: to give value to something):

[81] « Parce que le temps fort de l'autre côté de l'océan, c'est autre chose. Et le temps fort ici, même entre les Africains, nous Malgaches, le temps fort c'est "tap", tu vois avec le 6/8? (Il montre) C'est en haut comme ça. Parce que le verbe, c'est là-bas : "andrandràina" Donc, le futur, c'est là, donc, le temps fort c'est "Tap tap tap". » (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

During the same interview a bit later Ricky describes the placement of strong beats as something very personal and individual. He gives the example of singer and fellow musician Dama Mahaleo whose strong beat as Ricky argues is very different to their own. Here, Ricky describes the placement and feeling of strong beats as something that is determined by each person's individual education, his or her sensibility for the environment and the music that we carry in ourselves:



[82] « Parce qu’avec Dama, lui, le temps fort de Dama, quand il joue, c’est vraiment différent de nous ! Et ça c’est lui. C’est lui et là, tu ne peux pas dire : “Dama, ça c’est faux, non !” Mais vraiment c’est comme ça. C’est une question de sensibilité par rapport d’environnement, d’éducation, la forme de la musique à l’intérieur de lui-même. » (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

Bilo also speaks of the placement of strong beats in the way that it creates differences between Malagasy and European people. Although Europeans and Malagasy both have the ‘6/8 rhythm,’ he argues, Malagasy people tend to never play exactly on the beat. For him, Malagasy musicians never follow the beat “correctly” which is the biggest difference:

[83] « La différence, c’est le temps. Le temps du 6/8, parce que nous les Malgaches, on ne suit pas les temps correctement, juste au temps, juste dans la mesure. On fait des contretemps, ou mi-temps ou avant-temps ou avec le temps, c’est comme ça qu’on fait le 6/8. Et c’est ça un peu la différence entre les 6/8 européens et les 6/8 malgaches, parce qu’on chante pas direct dans le temps. Le rythme, ça tombe pas directement dans le temps, tac tac tac tac... Mais on peut chanter à mi-temps, le temps avant et on chante après. Ou on fait contretemps. Tu vois, c’est ça la différence. » (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

This resembles what Jaojoby explained to me. *Salegy* music for him is something that he describes as “round,” arguing that they never play on the first beat, but rather on the “contretemps.” Jaojoby does not speak of a difference to European people, but describes it as a problem that Europeans have with Malagasy music. However, he says that it is a question of “being bathed” in that music and that it could be learnt with a few years of practice and training:

[84] « Quand c’est pas carré, quand c’est rond, souvent on rentre en contretemps, on rentre jamais dans le premier temps. C’est ça le problème des Européens. Mais une fois qu’on est baigné dedans, toi qui t’intéresses au salegy depuis deux, trois ans là, tu peux jouer de ça ! » (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

In summary, apart from Ricky’s argument that it finally is a very individual and personal question, musicians all seem to agree that when it comes to counting to music or tapping or clapping along while musicking, differences between Malagasy and non-Malagasy (or better: European) people are striking. Most of these statements are actually based on experiences as well as observations that the musicians have made as the following part will show.

### Intercultural musical encounters - examples of musicians' experiences

Singer and guitarist Erick Manana told me that he was once in a studio recording in France where the technician was fascinated by what he was playing rhythmically. The technician decided to play in a 6/8 beat from a metronome which completely irritated Erick so that he was unable to play.<sup>94</sup> The technician then recorded what Erick was playing and was keen on finding the 'system' by looking at the sound diagrams on his computer. It turned out that the way Erick played was somehow irregular, but still this irregular pattern repeated itself regularly. Erick said that it is because he never plays exactly on the beat. It is rather a very special timing of the "temps forts," the strong beats. I will come back to this experiment towards the end of this chapter. Less curious, but rather frightened was his very first tour manager in France. Erick Manana said that the manager had asked him to stop tapping his feet during the concerts as that would confuse Western audiences. Although he was unable to do so (and left the tour manager), he says that if he plays for a non-Malagasy audience he tends to leave out the "complicated Malagasy rhythms" and rather plays rhythms with which the people can identify ("se retrouver"). In Madagascar he does exactly the opposite. That is why sometimes, if there are only a handful of Malagasy people in the audience in Europe, they happen to be a bit disappointed. At the same time, Erick Manana argues that he enjoys so much playing for people who do not know him as that makes him realise that there is something in Malagasy music which is really special and particular.<sup>95</sup>

The examples of Erick Manana's experiences in France resemble other intercultural encounters that many of the musicians have made. As all musicians I worked with are to some extent involved in the so-called 'world music' business (see section 2), almost all of them have played with musicians from outside Madagascar and/or have attended musical events, such as festivals, concerts, or recording sessions abroad. Here, I will focus on how musicians describe their musical experience with non-Malagasy musicians and their own observations on intercultural musical encounters.

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<sup>94</sup> Singer Bebey also told me the story that someone had tried to let legendary flute player Rakoto Frah to play with a metronome which did not work out at all. Rakoto Frah was horrified and said "This thing kills me!" Discussion with Bebey, 15.7.2008.

<sup>95</sup> Discussion with Erick Manana, 27.2.2008.

Ricky told me about a situation that he had seen at a festival in La Réunion where Malagasy accordionist Régis Gizavo, who is based in Paris and also member of the “Madagascar AllStars,” was accompanied by a percussionist who had problems capturing the right rhythm. Ricky was laughing while he explained that he immediately understood what was going on. The percussionist had played a ternary rhythm, like a waltz, which did not fit to the rhythm that Régis Gizavo had been playing. Ricky, confirming his point of view that rhythmical feeling is something very individual, says that it is not a question of being Malagasy, French or any other nationality, but rather the question of whether you get the rhythm or whether you do not:

[85] « J’ai vu un percussionniste qui joue avec Régis à la Réunion au « Kabardock », eux, ils ont des problèmes. Et moi, j’étais dans le public et moi je sais c’est quoi le problème (il rit). Parce que Régis il donne des trucs comme (il montre), et le gars il rentre dans le 3/4 (il montre) et c’est comme la valse ou je sais pas. Mais j’ai bien compris la situation. Donc, ça c’est pas l’histoire d’être Malgache ou Français ou Comorien ou..., mais c’est vraiment... tu captes ou tu captes pas. » (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

However, for the majority of musicians the fact of being Malagasy or not seems to be the most essential one. As already seen in previous analyses, some musicians speak of a Malagasy ‘soul’ that you need to have in order to play this music correctly. Bebey, for example, argues that the music never sounds properly Malagasy when foreign people play it as it is the “Malagasy soul” that is missing.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, Ratovo says that it is not too difficult for foreigners to capture the ‘6/8 rhythm,’ but there would always be the “soul” missing in their playing:

[86] « C’est très facile, surtout le 6/8. (...) Mais c’est l’âme qui manque ! » (Interview Ratovo, 26.7.2008)

Echoing the examples analysed above, strong beats and accentuation are again key issues that come up in the musicians’ discourses on their intercultural musical experiences. This is also the case for choreographer and dancer Ariry. In the interview he talks about a French dancer who had lived in Madagascar for nine years. Despite these nine years of collaboration, there had always been what Ariry calls a “contretemps of placement of the

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<sup>96</sup> Discussion with Bebey, 15.7.2008. Bebey further explained that this “soul” was something that Malagasy people could easily loose as well. Young people, for example, who mainly listen to foreign music would loose this Malagasy soul, the Malagasy rhythm and the Malagasy polyphonic singing.

strong beats.” The problem and difference lies in where to place the first beat (“l’attaque”) – this is also what he had experienced when he went to Europe and the United States to give dancing classes:

[87] Ariry : « (...) un Français. Et il était ici pendant neuf ans. Mais même neuf ans de pratique de ce qu’on avait fait, il y avait toujours... ce que moi je vais dire, un contretemps de temps fort que moi, je voudrais suivre. Et des fois, j’ai donné des cours en Europe ou aux Etats-Unis et il y a toujours ce problème là. »

Jenny : « Mais tu peux expliquer ce qu’ils font ? Si tu expliques la différence...

Ariry : « La différence, la différence c’est toujours l’attaque... »

Jenny : « L’attaque ? »

Ariry : « L’attaque du rythme. Le premier temps du rythme... Ah j’arrive pas vraiment à expliquer, mais je sais pas pourquoi, je sais pas comment, mais il y a toujours l’attaque du premier temps (il clappe) de ce que moi je pense le premier temps que moi j’aimerais bien suivre. Mais les autres personnes, ils ont une autre... leur propre premier temps. » (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

Hajazz is equally convinced that it is the accentuation and the placement of the strong beats that differ and that can create problems for foreigners who try to play Malagasy music. However, he distinguishes foreigners in the way that he argues that African people have fewer difficulties than European people:

[88] Hajazz : « Oui si... si... entre par exemple Africains, ça marche plus vite, avec des Européens c’est un peu difficile pour eux. Mais si, par exemple, on sait lire les notes comme ça, on peut déchiffrer quelques notes. Mais le problème de temps en temps, on peut pas, chacun a sa façon de jouer après. (...) Le problème c’est l’accentuation, les accents, il y a des accents, il y a du temps fort et temps faible. C’est pour cela par exemple que les gens étrangers n’arrivent pas à jouer comme les Malgaches. Parce qu’il y a l’accent (il tape le pied)... »

Jenny : « C’est quoi... »

Hajazz : « Le placement des temps forts et temps faibles et des soupirs et tout ça... Quoi dire ? Il y a les pédales, le... quoi dire ? Des nuances comme ça. » (Interview Hajazz, 12.8.2008)

Rajery sees the difficulties for *vazahas* in the structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries. As we have already seen in the section on the musicians’ discourses on how they ‘malagasise’ music, Rajery argues here that Malagasy people are capable of adding a ternary rhythm to a binary or vice versa:

[89] « Là, le problème de la musique malgache aussi avec les vazaha, c’est l’existence de binaire et ternaire en même temps dans une chanson, c’est... Tu vois (il rit). (...) Des fois si on fait des rencontres avec des musiciens étrangers,

ils ont eu du mal. Parce que nous, on est capable aussi d'introduire des rythmes ternaires dans les rythmes binaires ou l'envers. » (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

Justin Vali is also pointing at the structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries, arguing that it is the '6/8 rhythm' that foreigners have difficulties in following. The reason for this is that the rhythm is always "en l'air," an image and idea that I already analysed and discussed in chapter 3.2. Here, Justin also uses *salegy* as a synonym for '6/8 rhythm,' a phenomenon discussed in the previous chapter:

[90] « Parce que les musiciens, quand ils jouent le 6/8, le rythme était en l'air. Donc, c'est pour cela que souvent les musiciens à l'extérieur, ils ont toujours du mal à suivre le rythme. Et quand on fait le *salegy*, c'est toujours quand on donne des concerts à l'extérieur, les étrangers, c'est difficile pour eux de suivre le rythme *salegy*. » (Interview Justin, 23.11.2007)

To sum up, apart from Ricky's opinion on every musician's individuality, all musicians stress differences to non-Malagasy people and without exception talk about disappointments and situations that did *not* work out with regard to intercultural musical encounters. Is it a question of identity; the musicians' longing to search for a collective Malagasy musical identity? Or is it the longing to be recognised internationally and to promote Malagasy music on the international 'world music market'?

Not all the musicians I worked with are actively and directly involved in the international 'world music' scene. However, most musicians seem to reflect upon strategies and marketing discourses within the 'world music' business. At the same time it would be wrong to interpret the musicians' discourses on rhythm merely as a marketing strategy or a creation of a certain mystery of 'a Malagasy rhythm' that is and will remain a secret and ability to Malagasy people only. It is always important to bear the particular research context in mind. As argued throughout my thesis, my role as researcher and musician, my biographical background, the interview situations or the rather poor cultural infrastructure in Antananarivo to name but a few examples, have all had an influence on my research and therefore also on the musicians' discourses. Many musicians have definitely seen in me a possible connection to the Western music industry despite my trying to diminish this hope by insisting on being a PhD student and a musician researching and learning the music.

However, many topics that came up within the musicians' discourses show that rhythm is not only a topic that musicians like to talk about. It is the starting point for many musical projects, such as the 'malagasising' of music or Justin's most recent project of the first national orchestra of Madagascar. The idea and aim of "Ny Malagasy Orkestra" is based on the shared rhythmic base that they see in all Malagasy music and that allows for new musical fusions and experiments. A similar case has been the group "Sivy Mahasaky" (see chapter 3.1). Looking at the musicians' discourses analysed in chapter 3.2 and the range of topoi that comes up, as well as looking at their musical experiences (see above) and their struggling to find the right definitions and explanations (see chapter 3.1), it becomes immensely important, as also Agawu (2003) argues (see chapter 2.2) that we, as researchers, listen carefully to the musicians' own voices and their concepts and ideas.

#### Participating musically myself

Trying to understand 'rhythm' through the musicians' perspectives has helped me a great deal to learn and play Malagasy music as well as to integrate my own musical experiences into my analysis which I will present in the following part.

And yet, bearing in mind all the musicians' statements about non-Malagasy people being unable to perform Malagasy music and their narratives on failed musical adventures of non-Malagasy people venturing into Malagasy music making, how do I fit my own musical experiences into these discourses?

Many musicians have argued that one needs to play Malagasy music in order to properly understand it. Further, they have expressed certain discontent that it is always non-musicians writing about music and musicians being unable to write about music or explain properly what they are doing.<sup>97</sup> In various interview situations and even more so during rehearsals, concerts or recording sessions, I have felt very much encouraged not only by the musicians but also in conversations with people from the audiences. So far I have not had any sceptical or generally negative responses or reactions towards my participation in Malagasy music making. Rather the contrary: Malagasy people in particular very often expressed their hope, interest and curiosity in my work, saying that this kind of research and work, but also this kind of musical event (referring to me, a

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<sup>97</sup> An argument that also appears in musicological scholarly debates, see for example Cook (1999).

*vazaha*, performing live Malagasy music) was necessary and useful. They often expressed their fear that Malagasy music was not enough appreciated by Malagasy people themselves, especially by younger people who are supposedly mainly interested in Western pop music. A German musician/researcher who dedicates all her energy and time to Malagasy music is therefore often seen and presented in a very symbolic way. It also often happened that people from the audience came to speak to me after a concert and asked where and when my academic work would be available to the public and where and how I was planning to make it accessible especially to the Malagasy communities as that would not only be interesting, but also very important. Another aspect has given me confidence in practicing Malagasy music and also using these practices and experiences for my research and analysis. This aspect has to do with Agawu's notion of a "*presumption of sameness*" (Agawu 2003: 171). Intercultural musical encounters are first of all about interaction and musical exchange. Even if it was me learning 'their music,' I can recall many situations in which I have actually suddenly felt as the one being researched (see examples given in chapter 2.3). Every musician carries a certain musical 'baggage'<sup>98</sup> with him, depending on former musical education, training, experiences, access to musical events, recordings etc. It is based on this 'baggage' and the use for exchange and interaction of it that we can create a *shared* musical experience when musicking.

### The interrelation of discourses and musical practices

I would like to stress that my own musical practices and experiences are not to be understood as any kind of instruction to learn and play Malagasy music. My aim here is to give examples of how engaging in discussion with the musicians and how listening to and analysing their discourses informed my musical practices and how in turn, the experiences I gained through musicking informed my analysis of the discourses.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, the examples I will give should not be understood as in any kind of chronological order (that would bring up the problem of the chicken and the egg), but rather as examples of a constant interplay in which one informs the other. I will therefore

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<sup>98</sup> A term also often used by the Malagasy musicians when talking about their own musical background, knowledge or training.

<sup>99</sup> For a complementary assessment of this theme, see Fuhr (in press 2011).

often refer back to aspects and topoi that came up within my analyses of the last chapters and at the beginning of this chapter. I have discussed in section 2 that ethnographic fieldwork is often impossible to be considered ‘finished’ when it comes to writing up the ethnographic report. Rather, it remains an on-going process and in this respect, the following should also be seen as research in progress and the examples given as a snapshot of this on-going interrelation within my research that includes both, the analysis of discourses and the analysis of musical practices. I will first give examples that relate to the Malagasy concept of oral tradition, the *lova-tsofina*. This allows me to immediately touch upon the crux of my research, the issue of the ‘6/8 rhythm.’ I will then give further detailed examples on elements and interdependencies in Malagasy music that I have experienced and that all relate to and are to some extent based on the previous examples.

### Examples<sup>100</sup>

#### The importance of the *lova-tsofina*

Engaging in discussions with the musicians, listening to, and analysing their discourses about the music have given me much inspiration and help for learning and playing Malagasy music. I have become aware of topics, ideas, and also methods that otherwise I would have never thought about, never used, or never felt and experienced.

I would like to start by giving the perhaps most obvious, but yet particularly important example as it has been the starting point, if not base for many others. If the musicians had not talked so much about their ways of learning music using nothing but their ears and if they had not emphasised so much the *lova-tsofina* as the base for Malagasy music making, I would have not tried to follow, understand, and use the concept myself. Many musicians encouraged me to learn only with my ears, such as Doné Andriambaliha in my very first *valiha* lesson in Antananarivo; but musicians also indirectly encouraged me to discover and use the *lova-tsofina*, by saying, for example, that you have to learn the Malagasy language or that it helps to live in Madagascar for a certain time in order to learn and play the music. I will come back to these more concrete examples in detail later. The counterpart to this first example is that it is only through experiencing the

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<sup>100</sup> I have included a DVD with video and sound examples of a few of my musical practices. At those points where aspects and issues discussed in my thesis can be further explored by the reader through watching the video- and listening to the sound examples I have added a footnote.



music, through learning and playing it and therefore gaining *shared* experiences with the musicians that I could understand the essential idea of the *lova-tsofina* as the base for Malagasy music making. Following the musicians' ideas and their own experiences of learning and playing by ear has helped me to understand and play the music without searching for any kind of 'authoritarian text' or any kind of written source behind the music. Rather: it is through my own musical practices that I have found other musical references (e.g. for tempi, accentuation etc) or playing techniques that in turn, also helped me to better understand or make sense of the musicians' discourses. Engaging musically has made me realise that it is not so much about searching for any kind of exact musical 'instructions' within the musicians' discourses on their music, but as I will show in the examples below, it is rather about listening to their own concepts, ideas, and experiences. These first examples of how discourses and musical practices are interrelated with regard to the *lova-tsofina* also connect with aspects of my theoretical and methodological framework. As I have followed Agawu's demand for a "*presumption of sameness*" (Agawu 2003), I have tried to carefully listen to the musicians' own voices and therefore search for their own concepts and ideas about the music. I have tried not to impose a Western interpretation, i.e. by using Western notation to transcribe the music. However, with regard to the "subject-centred ethnography" (Rice 2003) and the focus on individuals, I have equally included my own experiences and have therefore also focussed on issues of self-reflexivity as discussed in detail in section 2. As much as I have analysed the musicians' individual experiences, I have equally analysed my own and have reflected upon and considered my own musical 'baggage' such as my own former classical music education.

#### '6/8 rhythm' and the *opportunity* of binaries and ternaries

These first examples given allow me to come back to the crux of my research, the issue of the '6/8 rhythm.' My own experiences of learning and playing Malagasy music by following the *lova-tsofina*, have made me understand that any attempt to count to the music or imagine a particular metre with any fixed accentuation would confuse or even disturb rather than help me. However, I have discovered another way for me personally which helps me to keep the tempo and yet enables me to play around with accentuations

and ‘keep the dialogue’ with the other musicians. It is something I could describe as a kind of ‘inner dance,’ a way of moving and using my body movements as a reference. I am speaking of an ‘inner’ dance since I am not actually properly dancing, but moving in subtle ways, such as swaying my head or the upper part of my body just a little bit. It is also through finding and using this reference, that I have come to understand and see one element related to the ‘6/8 rhythm’ differently to my former understanding, namely the structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries. As seen in chapter 2.1, this structure is crucial for Malagasy music, as other scholars also have pointed out. Malagasy musicologist Rakotomalala (2003), for example, argues that the Malagasy rhythm is either in 2, but thought in 3, or it is in 3, but thought in 2 (Rakotomalala 2003: 43-44; see chapter 2.1). The topic of a structure of binaries and ternaries also appear in the musicians’ discourses as we have seen throughout this section. According to my own experiences gained through both, musicking and analysing discourses, I could best describe this structure as a constant *opportunity*, meaning that no accentuation is fixed through a particular metre, but rather that there is a constant opportunity for musicians to play with and put accents on both, binaries and ternaries. This also implies that both are not necessarily always audibly present and necessarily felt or experienced equally by all musicians and music listeners involved. Using my body as a reference to follow this constant opportunity helps me not to fall into any particular metre with a determined accentuation, but rather helps me to follow other references for accentuation, such as the language as I will explain below.<sup>101</sup> The use of body movements as a reference or also as a source for musicking is a well-known phenomenon. Rice (1994) for example speaks of physical behaviour that becomes part of the conceptual source to generate musical ideas, referring to his personal discovery of how to make use of hand motions when playing the Bulgarian bagpipe (Rice 1994: 83). As seen in the last chapter, the musicians also point at the relation between music and dance, for example, or see rhythm as being inherent in movements, such as walking. The topic of body movements also reappears in other examples that I will give below, such as with regard to particular playing techniques of instruments or to the topic of personality/individuality in music.

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<sup>101</sup> Examples of my subtle body movements can be seen in all the video examples, especially example 1 and 2.

I remember how confused and irritated I was when during one of my first research stays in Antananarivo I happened to be at a Christmas party where the song “Silent night” was sung and people were tapping their feet differently: some in 2 (highlighting a binary structure), some in 3 (emphasising the ternary structure). Since then, I have come across many other examples of this kind; within the musicians’ discourses Rakotomavo, for example, argues that a French waltz would be played in a binary rhythm in Madagascar or Rajery explains that the coexistence of both, binaries and ternaries is often the major obstacle within Malagasy music for Europeans (see interview quotes above).

A look at Henry Stobart and Ian Cross’ study of “Easter songs” in the Bolivian Andes (Stobart and Cross 2000) shows that the confusion created through the Western concept of a ‘6/8 rhythm’ and the apparently existing structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries in a non-Western music is not unique to the case of Malagasy music. Their point of departure described in their article on rhythmic structure and their perception mirrors in various ways my own, but their method and research approach is very different and contradicts my own. In the introduction of their article, they mention the first major study on Andean music that was undertaken by Raoul and Marguerite d’Harcourt in 1925.<sup>102</sup> The couple d’Harcourt describes how the inhabitants of Arequipa were proud of the fact that a famous Spanish pianist was unable to reproduce the rhythmic particularities of Peruvian music. They further write that they themselves were able to finally overcome their initial disorientation and discover the “secret” of the rhythm. Interestingly, they say that this was possible through mingling with the people from the country and through observing their rapid feet tapping movements that were beating the “rhythmic accents” (“temps rythmique”) rather than the “measure” (“mésure”) (Stobart and Cross 2000: 64). However Stobart and Cross (2000) remark that it is rather unfortunate that d’Harcourt fail to divulge this “secret” that they discovered in their work. Various researchers who worked on Andean music have also identified some general rhythmical characteristics, such as for example “polyrhythmic relationships typically of duplets and triplets, for example between melody and percussion” (d’Harcourt 1925) or “linear interplay between duplets and triplets” (Leichtman 1987) (quoted in Stobart and Cross 2000: 66). However, there is one important difference concerning Stobart and Cross’ study, which is

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<sup>102</sup> D’Harcourt, Raoul and Marguerite (1925).

the starting point for their particular research focus on rhythmic structure and perception. The authors regard transcriptions as having a useful and potential value for musical analysis and see it as a way of documenting and referencing certain types of field recordings. Interestingly, it was in the process of transcribing for referencing purposes that the rhythmic perception appeared as a problematic issue to them.<sup>103</sup> This problematic issue then led them to conduct listening exercises with Bolivian and European subjects in which they were asked to clap to different musics. Stobart and Cross write that whereas the “Easter songs” by the Europeans were perceived as a compound anacrusic 6/8 rhythm, the footfalls of the Bolivian dancers implied an on-beat 2/4 rhythm and therefore a non-anacrusic perception. Bolivian subjects tend to always perceive the first note as hierarchically dominant even if the first pair of notes was in a short-long pattern (Stobart and Cross 2000: 72; 83). By referring to David Hughes (1990) the authors write that this leads to the suggestion “that metre, as construed with the Western music-theoretic tradition, may not have the universal applicability that is generally assumed for it” (Stobart and Cross 2000: 84).

This process of finding and approaching the research problem is interesting for my own research in as far as it contradicts some of my main arguments. Firstly, to some extent it imposes a Western view on the music or at least takes the Western understanding (or then: confusion!) to discover difference (to refer to Agawu 2003) which then becomes the starting point for the research. Secondly, the research here seems mainly built on observation and music analysis. Neither the perspectives of the musicians and performers themselves (through for example ethnographic interviews) are included in the article, nor is the opportunity to understand through musical practices – both essential for ethnomusicological research as I argue with my own research project.

### Engaging in ‘malagasising’ music

As I have already highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, rhythm and more specifically the structure of binaries and ternaries is also a topic that comes up when musicians talk about their way of composing or when they talk about how they

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<sup>103</sup> With reference to Seeger (1958), they explain that ethnomusicologists have traditionally distinguished two sorts of transcriptions: “descriptive” transcriptions intended for analysis purposes and “prescriptive” transcriptions to realise or reproduce the music (Stobart and Cross 2000: 68 in footnotes).

‘malagasise’ other music. Also within other topoi, the musicians regularly point at this particular rhythmic structure within their discourses. The most recent music project I have been involved in is Erick Manana’s project of ‘malagasising’ standard jazz tunes and also Brazilian *bossa* tunes. We are in the middle of this project which means that there are on-going rehearsals and that also Erick Manana himself is still composing, arranging, changing, and trying out.<sup>104</sup> However, although – or maybe even exactly because it is a project in progress and I have been involved in it from the beginning on – I have gained extremely valuable musical experiences. Again, these experiences helped me (and still are helping me) to better understand the musicians’ discourses, particularly concerning rhythmic structure in music, and have also confirmed to me again my feeling and understanding of a certain constant *opportunity* of binaries and ternaries in the music as described above. Playing this ‘malagasised’ music has also again made me realise that counting to the music or thinking of a particular metre would not be helpful to me when musicking.

The experiences gained through this project are special in the way that I mostly know and am familiar with the original tunes, such as “La vie en rose” (Edith Piaf), “What a wonderful world” (Louis Armstrong), or “Nuages” or “Tears” by Django Reinhardt. This has been helpful and challenging at the same time: Knowing the original tunes has offered me a detailed view on and experience of what exactly changes in the process of ‘malagasising’ it. At the same time, being familiar with the original tune has also sometimes made it difficult to ‘loosen’ myself from and take distance from exact rhythmical or melodic structures or arrangements of the original. Again, I have realised that using my subtle body movements as a rhythmical reference works well and avoids

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<sup>104</sup> Sound examples 4-9 show different examples of ‘malagasised’ tunes by Erick Manana. Examples 4-7 are recorded during rehearsals. It is still work in progress and the recordings can only give an idea of the songs and do not present finished versions. Example 4 and 5 are Erick Manana’s own versions of Django Reinhardt’s “Nuages” and “Tears,” only showing my violin part accompanied by the guitar. Examples 6 and 7 are ‘malagasised’ versions of two Brazilian *bossa* songs: “Você Abusou” by Antonio Carlos and Jocaifi; and “Sampa” by Caetano Veloso. Examples 8 and 9 are taken from the CD “Made in Madagasikara,” a recording produced in 2008, featuring Erick Manana’s ‘malagasised’ version of Edith Piaf’s “La vie en rose” and the jazz standard “All of me,” originally composed by Gerald Marks and Seymour Simons. Erick Manana says that in all his ‘malagasised’ version of songs he draws on regional musical styles of the High Plateaux music, particularly the style of the *hira gasy*. Listening to these examples, I would say (also according to experiences gained through musicking myself, but even more through talking to other musicians and music listeners) that it is likely that people hear, experience, and perceive the rhythmic structure differently.

any attempt to try and count to the music while playing. So what happens if music becomes ‘malagasised’? As much as all my examples here should not be understood as ‘instructions’ of how to learn and play Malagasy music, I can also answer this question only by sharing what I have gained as knowledge and experiences through analysing both, musicking- and listening to and analysing discourses- interdependently. According to my own experiences, I do agree with many musicians and would say that ‘malagasising’ is definitely always also about changing the rhythmical structure of the music: I think that it could best be described as giving this constant *opportunity* of binaries and ternaries to any music. Sometimes it is about adding a ternary structure to a binary, sometimes vice versa. Having said this, I would like to repeat that this does not imply that both are necessarily always audibly present and that rhythmical perception could be different for different people. According to what I have been experiencing myself, I could also describe it as a change of my listening habit in the way that I even realised that I start to hear a rhythmical structure of binaries and ternaries in (non-Malagasy) music that before I would have heard or perceived as either in two, or in three. This experience does not only mirror some of the musicians’ arguments, e.g. about hearing or dancing a waltz in a binary rhythm, but also mirrors an aspect of Justin London’s understanding of ‘metre’ that he regards as a kind of “entrained behaviour” (London 2004: 4-6; see discussion on theories on ‘rhythm’ and ‘metre’ in chapter 2.1). As already described in chapter 2.3, I have realised that people in the audience tend to clap differently to the music, but also musicians who play together tap their feet differently on stage. However, I have not undertaken any specific listening exercises or studies as Stobart and Cross (2000) did, comparing the rhythmical perception from subjects with different culture and language backgrounds. I would argue that what I describe as an *opportunity* is often misleadingly called and referred to as ‘6/8 rhythm.’ Misleading in the way that the particular metre of a ‘6/8 rhythm’ would for example determine a particular accentuation as argued in chapter 2.1. ‘Malagasising’ music to me, however, does not only seem to be about changing the rhythmical structure, or in other words, ‘rhythm’ needs to be understood in a very wide sense. I have said above that Erick Manana argues that he mainly creates High Plateaux

versions of songs, i.e. within the regional musical style of where he comes from.<sup>105</sup> I will explain in more detail later how - through analysing the musicians' discourses and my own musical practices - I could describe some particularities of the music of the High Plateaux region. Further descriptions of regional musical styles can be found in Randrianary (2001).

My idea and experience of a constant *opportunity* of binaries and ternaries raises the following question: if there is no fixed indication in the music such as a 'metre,' what determines accentuation, or more generally the rhythmical structure of a piece? And further, how are regional particularities in Malagasy music related to rhythmical structure?

Listening and analysing the musicians' discourses on the different topoi that I described in the last chapter, but also generally their discourses on 'rhythm' and the debate on the '6/8 rhythm' have made me question my own understanding of the term and concept of 'rhythm' as such. Most importantly, it has made me understand that 'rhythm' cannot in any way be regarded and understood separately from other musical elements, but that the importance lies in seeing and understanding connections and interdependencies between different elements in the music that I will describe in the examples below.

I have directed my attention towards the musicians' own concepts and ideas. At the same time, experimenting in my musical practices by trying to follow these ideas and concepts has also made me better understand and see differently the musicians' discourses which I will try to explain with further concrete examples.

#### The importance of language and lyrics

In the last chapter I have identified language as one of the topoi that the musicians very much refer to in their ideas about the origin and meaning of 'rhythm' in Madagascar. As I have argued that all topoi are closely related, aspects of language can also be found in other topoi, such as in everyday life as speaking is obviously a daily activity. Musicians emphasise the particularity of Madagascar compared to other African countries as Malagasy is spoken all across the island; some point at the close relation of language and tempo or language and accentuation in music. For some musicians, language is also an

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<sup>105</sup> See sound examples 4 -9.

important factor that they reflect upon when they compose new songs (see beginning of this chapter). If the topic of the Malagasy language had not appeared so persistently in the musicians' discourses, I probably would have not tried to use my knowledge of Malagasy for my experiences of musicking – on different levels. I have tried to learn or at least keep the sound of the lyrics in my mind when learning a new song. This has not only helped me to capture the story, emotion, or idea told within the song, but on a more concrete level and mirroring Rakotomavo's idea about language determining accentuation in music, it can help to find the right tempo and to place accentuations right. With my violin and my recorder, I often play an introduction to a song, mirroring the melody that will be sung afterwards. Here, I actually imagine the singing or hear the words in my mind while playing my instrument. Similarly, when I play the counter-melody while the song is being sung, I carefully listen to the lyrics and therefore to the accentuation and tempo and it feels as if I am responding or engaging in a dialogue.<sup>106</sup> Also in the project of 'malagasising' tunes, mentioned above, I very much use lyrics and language as a reference and imagine the lyrics or the singing while musicking. This has been especially useful in as far as it helps me not to fall back into the original tune. In turn, it is also true to say that it is through using aspects of the language while musicking and experimenting with language and tempo or accentuation that I have come to better understand the musicians' statement and ideas. I remember, for example, that I had difficulties at the beginning when Erick Manana started singing to me in order to teach me new songs or new parts or accompaniments to a song. I first only listened to the actual notes and was surprised that he was not satisfied when I replayed exactly the notes that he had just sung to me. It was only gradually and in the process of learning through both, listening to discourses and experimenting musically, that I realised that I need to mimic and listen carefully to not only the notes, but that it is about the exact length of each note, the exact accentuation and tempo, and that it is not at all arbitrary which lyrics or words he chooses to teach me.

Language has also been an important topic that Stobart and Cross (2000) have drawn from their studies of "Easter songs." As mentioned in the previous chapter they have

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<sup>106</sup> In video example 2, for instance, I play a counter-melody as an introduction to the song "Tsofina Rano," a composition by Erick Manana. Here, I imagine the lyrics and the melody (that later will be sung) in order to place accentuation and tempo of the counter-melody right.



performed listening and clapping exercises with subjects from different culture and language backgrounds and have found out that Bolivian subject who all spoke Quechua or Aymara as their mother tongue, even though many did not know this specific music before, clapped in time with the performer's footfalls - in contrast to all European subjects (Stobart and Cross 2000: 81). A possible explanation for this, they see in the prosodic structure of both languages, Quechua and Aymara (Stobart and Cross 2000: 83-84) and argue that language is significant for the understanding of rhythmic structure in Andean music (Stobart and Cross 2000: 88).

Although I have often observed differences in rhythmic perception between *vazahas* and Malagasy people and also the musicians' statements on intercultural encounters (analysed above) point at differences based on different cultural backgrounds, I have also seen Malagasy people clapping or tapping their feet differently when playing together. And according to Ricky, for example (see chapter 3.2), the perception of strong beats was something very individual and already different between the different members of the "Madagascar AllStars."

Through my analysis of the musicians' discourses and especially through my own musical practices, I would argue that language plays a role with regard to the rhythmic structure of the music. As argued above, I realised that it often helps to place tempo and accentuation correctly if I imagine to sing or to speak while I am actually playing my instruments.

#### The importance of the instrument and its playing technique

The idea of using imagination while musicking has also come across to me through yet another example of how the musicians' discourses influenced my musical experiences, an example which again is closely related, if not based on the *lova-tsofina*.

Many of the musicians are not only autodidacts, but have also built their own instruments. This might be one of the reasons why they often talk about how particular playing techniques of instruments or the material or shape of an instrument influence or form the music. For many, the playing technique forms part of the music, be it for example the percussion caused through the blowing technique of the *sodina* flute or the

falling of the fingers onto the bamboo, wooden or plastic tube of the flute, or the rattling sound of the strings of the bamboo zither *valiha* to name but a few examples.

This is for example the reason why Rakotomavo was very critical about Justin Vali's project of "Ny Malagasy orchestra," mentioned in chapter 3.1. Rakotomavo at the time saw difficulties for that project in as far as instruments were often very individual and personal in Madagascar:

[91] « C'est un projet très difficile, parce que réunir des gens qui n'ont jamais quitté leur coin, avec des instruments très personnels qu'ils ont fabriqué eux-mêmes, donc... Quand je fabrique un instrument, c'est pour moi. C'est moi qui va le jouer, c'est pas les autres. Et comme je vous ai dit tout à l'heure, entre deux *valiha*, ça ne passe pas. Il faut qu'il joue son instrument. Et cet instrument-là n'a pas été conçu d'être dans un orchestre. C'est pour jouer seul. Donc, c'est ça le problème pour ce genre de projets. » (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

As I explained in chapter 2.3, I started to learn to play the *valiha* during my first research stay in Antananarivo. Currently, I am playing and performing Malagasy music mainly with my violin and recorder. However, my amateurish *valiha* playing has helped me in as far as so much in Malagasy music, especially in the High Plateaux region, for example regarding playing technique or phrasing, has its origin in *valiha* music. The instrument is mostly tuned in a diatonic scale. It is played with both hands, the notes alternating left and right.



Playing technique of the bamboo zither *valiha*.

Picture taken during my *valiha* lesson with Doné Andriambaliha in Antananarivo, February 2005.

The instrument's tuning with the notes alternating left and right and also its playing technique shapes the sound and the style of *valiha* music, also for example with regard to tempo and accentuation. If I now play a typical *valiha* phrasing on my violin or my recorder, imagining playing it on the *valiha* helps for example to place each note, the accentuation and also the tempo right, i.e. by imagining and knowing the playing technique, shape and sound of the *valiha* itself.

I would like to explain this further with a concrete example that then also leads over to the following examples. In Erick Manana's song "Bitika"<sup>107</sup> that we played at the *Olympia* concert in Paris, I played a chorus that Erick Manana had developed beforehand and had taught me through singing it to me. The way Erick Manana arranged "Bitika" for that concert and what I played is mainly in the *hira gasy* style of the High Plateaux region that I will come back to again below. However, a few parts are also a bit like a short musical voyage through Madagascar as it plays with other regional styles. One element during the chorus is a musical reference to the musician Rakotozafy, a famous already deceased *marovany* player from the North-East of the island who I already mentioned in chapter 2.1. Rakotozafy is known and admired for his virtuosic playing and special phrasings, such as a typical run downwards<sup>108</sup> which Malagasy people immediately associate with him and his playing style and also the sound of his self-built *marovany*. When I play these runs on my violin, but also on my recorder,<sup>109</sup> imagining playing it on the *valiha* helps enormously as the playing technique (picking the strings, using both hands) and tuning of the instrument with the notes alternating left and right creates a very particular way/sound of this phrasing. If the musicians had not talked so much about the interdependence between the instrument, its playing style and the sound and style of the music, I would probably not have tried to use my knowledge of *valiha* playing for my violin and recorder playing. At the same time, my practical experiences of having learnt *valiha* from scratch and even more so, learning and playing Malagasy music, using my own violin (played in Western classical style) and my own Renaissance recorder (and not

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<sup>107</sup> See video example 3. Erick Manana had planned to sing this song during the concert at the "Olympia" and parts of my violin part had been arranged to accompany his singing voice. However, as Erick struggled with a croaky voice during the concert, he spontaneously decided on stage to perform an instrumental version of the song.

<sup>108</sup> An example of this typical run can be seen in video example 3, 0:10:10 – 0:10:28.

<sup>109</sup> See video example 3, 0:14:15 – 0:14:27.

a Malagasy *sodina*) has made me understand the musicians' discourses on these musical interdependencies and has made me focus more on how a particular instrument or a particular playing technique shapes and even becomes part of the music making.

The Malagasy *sodina* in the High Plateaux region is either made of bamboo, wood or plastic and is played always taken slightly to the side as there is no mouth piece as to the Western treble recorder, but the blowing technique rather resembles that of the transverse flute. It is played with lots of air and watching *sodina* players, it almost looks as if the flute was 'dancing' or 'jumping' in front of the mouth. Various musicians explained to me that the sound created through this playing technique, such as the sound of the blowing air which is often almost percussion-like, or the sound of the falling of the fingers onto the flute that I mentioned earlier, form part of the music.

When I play Malagasy music on my Renaissance recorder, I am also taking the instrument slightly to the side, not in any way to look more like a Malagasy player, but for reasons concerning particular elements in the music that I have also already described in the examples above: holding the recorder to the side and blowing with more air does not only approach the sound of the *sodina* flute, but it allows me to play more easily with and differentiate more in terms of accentuation. It further helps in imagining the lyrics, i.e. imagining to speak or to sing while actually playing my instrument what I have described above.<sup>110</sup> I will talk about *sodina* playing again below when I will come back to the famous *sodina* player Rakoto Frah.

I have made comparable experiences with my violin playing. I have been mainly playing music from the High Plateaux region or music in the style of this particular region and violin music and the sound of violin is there mainly associated with the *hira gasy*, mentioned in chapter 2.1 and 2.3. So far there has not been any research particularly focusing on the musical aspect of the *hira gasy*. Ethnographic studies include only a few and very brief musical descriptions of the *hira gasy* (Edkvist 1997: 76-79; 118-119 and Mauro 2001: 205-206). *Hira gasy* violin players often hold their instrument against their upper part of the body, but often also in the 'Western way,' with the violin resting on the shoulder. They often tighten the bow's hair with the same hand they are holding the bow, grapping it rather towards the middle than at the bow frog as in the Western classical

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<sup>110</sup> Examples of my playing style with my Renaissance recorder can be seen in video example 1 and 3.

way. I have not changed the way I am holding my violin and the bow. However, as for the recorder, I have discovered certain interdependencies between the playing technique of the instrument and the music. Erick Manana who has grown up often being surrounded by *hira gasy* musicians and who says himself that many of his own compositions are inspired by this particular style of Malagasy music told me a few times during our rehearsals that the most typical element in *hira gasy* violin playing for him was a rather rhythmical playing style with the bow hardly ever resting. He often asked me to “put more little notes” (“mettre plus des petites notes”): especially if I play a counter-melody with my violin (or also with my recorder), it is often about adding particular rhythmical runs that are specific for *hira gasy* music.<sup>111</sup> In order to play these runs correctly in terms of accentuation and tempi, it helps enormously to follow what I have described as my subtle body movements that generally functions for me as a rhythmical reference. Imagining the lyrics or the singing is also a way of getting these runs ‘right’ as I have for example explained above that I already imagine the lyrics when I play an instrumental introduction to a song.<sup>112</sup>

It is often in these moments when I play these runs (like a reference to *hira gasy* music; similar to the example given above concerning the reference to the playing style of Rakotozafy) that the audience reacts.<sup>113</sup> It is something that I would like to touch upon in the next example as to me it is related to the issue of identity and to what extent Malagasy people identify with the music (see below).

I have given these few descriptions of my playing techniques in order to show that engaging in musical activities myself, has not only made me aware of many interdependencies within the music, such as between accentuation and language, or body movements and playing techniques, but it has also influenced and helped my analyses of exactly these topics within the musicians’ discourses. The same is true vice versa: it is through analysing and listening to the musicians’ discourses that I started to play and to experiment exactly with those interdependencies, and to analyse our *shared* musical experiences.

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<sup>111</sup> Examples of these runs can be seen in video example 2 with my violin, 0:05:06 – 0:05:09 and 0:05:20 – 0:05:23; or also video example 3 with my recorder, 0:13:33 – 0:13:37 and 0:13:49 – 0:13:53.

<sup>112</sup> See for example the beginning of the song “Tsofina Rano,” video example 2.

<sup>113</sup> This can also be observed in the video examples.

As mentioned above, I would like to give one more example of the interrelation between my analyses of discourses and musical practices that will bring us back full circle to the discourses analysed at the beginning of this chapter, namely as it concerns my being a German and classically trained musician and researcher engaging in Malagasy musicking.

#### The emphasis on personality/individuality in Malagasy music

It is another aspect in Malagasy music that I have only come across through both, carefully listening to the musicians' discourses and engaging in musical practices myself. It also touches upon questions of identity – a topic that runs like a thread throughout the musicians' discourses as we have seen throughout the last chapters. As we have also seen in one example given above, Rakotozafy is not only a well-known musical personality, but certain musical features are associated with him and his particular playing style and sound. According to my own experience, Malagasy people tend to stress the importance of personality within music and how personality influences and shapes the music. In Western classical music, for example, I have rather experienced that it is the musical piece or *oeuvre* as such that becomes the centre, although nowadays there is definitely a tendency to also focus on the interpreters as for example the marketing of certain 'classical superstars' shows (I am thinking for example of pianist Lang Lang, or violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter).<sup>114</sup> In Malagasy music making I think to have understood that it is mainly about the overall picture or better interplay of musician (musician's personality) and music. Musicians argue that the *lova-tsofina* itself is already always personal and individual as it is with your very own ears that you learn and play the music. This also shines through in the musicians' explanations about the self-built and therefore personal instruments as seen above. I will explain this aspect with a more detailed example that also concerns my own experiences of musicking, especially with my recorder. *Sodina* (Malagasy: flute) playing in Madagascar is inevitably associated with and related to one particular person: Philibert Rabazoza, alias Rakoto Frah, who I already mentioned before. The legendary flute player who over many years formed the sound of Malagasy

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<sup>114</sup> For an impression of the marketing of these musicians, see for example: <http://www.langlang.com/> (accessed 6.10.2010) or [http://www.anne-sophie-mutter.de/md\\_onstage.php](http://www.anne-sophie-mutter.de/md_onstage.php) (accessed 6.10.2010)

flute music, particularly in the High Plateaux region, died in Antananarivo in 2001. I have not experienced one occasion, be it in Madagascar or abroad, where *sodina* music was played, heard or spoken of without Rakoto Frah being mentioned and becoming the source of numerous stories, memories, and anecdotes. It would exceed the framework of my thesis to recall all of these moments and retell the vivid memories people have of this musical folk hero.<sup>115</sup> However, I will give a brief insight into just a few of them as they are of great importance to many of the musicians I have worked with. They do not only give an idea of Rakoto Frah's personality and character, but they also provide an insight into his playing techniques and styles – these two aspects are highly interrelated and interdependent as I shall argue here.

Despite his great popularity as a musical folk hero, Rakoto Frah never became a wealthy man. In contrary, until his death he lived in his home neighbourhood, in Isotry, one of the poorest quarters of Antananarivo. People often mention with regret and anger that Rakoto Frah was never properly supported and his popularity never officially recognised and rewarded, a topic that is also raised in songs composed for and dedicated to him.<sup>116</sup>

Almost ironically, a picture of his face was printed on the 1000 FMG banknote, the former currency of the country.<sup>117</sup> Rakoto Frah is known for always carrying at least one of his flutes in his pockets, ready to take it out at any moment and making it part of his everyday life. It is his everyday activities, movements, and attitudes that people relate to his flute playing. If you watched Rakoto Frah eating his daily rice with his own special technique of dividing the rice in small portions on his spoon and chewing the rice in his own peculiar way, you would see him playing the flute. If you listened to Rakoto Frah speaking to his friends, flirting with girls, or arguing during a discussion, you would hear the sound of his flute. People would even applaud when he spoke as his way of speaking and telling stories was like he was playing the flute. Rakoto is further known for speaking in the same manner to every person, not making any difference between a politician, a foreigner, a child, or a beggar; always speaking in his mother tongue, Malagasy, or even

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<sup>115</sup> The idea of collecting these memories, stories, and anecdotes remains a project that I would like to accomplish, not only as these memories are immensely important and a treasure within Malagasy culture, but also as they could function as a kind of window into Malagasy flute playing.

<sup>116</sup> See “Lasa i Rakoto”, and “O Rakoto” composed by Erick Manana.

<sup>117</sup> In 2003 the Malagasy currency changed from FMG to Ariary. 1000 FMG was worth between € 0.14 and € 0.30. For further information on the currency change, see [http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/043/article\\_23988.asp](http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/043/article_23988.asp) (accessed 1.11.2010).

more specifically the language of his quarter Isotry. Rakoto Frah was free to walk around all alone in Antananarivo at any time as even the cruellest thief would accompany him home at night - out of respect. Policemen and the gendarmerie would humbly apologise if by chance they had stopped a vehicle with Rakoto Frah travelling inside. He refused the brand new set of teeth that was once offered to him, not only because he felt strange about it, but also he said that it would disturb him playing the flute. Once abroad, Rakoto Frah would be crying of homesickness, longing to go home. As soon as he saw musicians, wherever and no matter in which occasion and at which place, he could not be stopped to take out his flute and join in. I cannot go into more detail here, but the essence of these memories and stories is that Rakoto Frah was (and still remains) a true folk hero for many Malagasy people. They regard Rakoto and his flutes as inseparable and within those memories emphasise the interplay between Rakoto's personality and his music. The flute playing was part of his everyday experiences, even as far as his way of speaking, his everyday movements (eating, walking etc) were related to his playing styles and the sound produced on his flutes.

Unfortunately, I never got to know Rakoto Frah personally. Also, I have actually never properly played on a Malagasy flute. When I tried once or twice, I hardly managed to get a proper sound out of this rather small wooden tube. So far, I have always performed on my Renaissance recorder, having tried to develop my very own way of adapting my playing technique to Malagasy music. And yet, after the concert at the "Olympia" in Paris and at every other concert ever since, Malagasy people come to me asking whether and how I have learned with Rakoto Frah, telling me that everything (including my way of moving on stage, for example the way of taking out my recorder) reminded them of Rakoto Frah.<sup>118</sup> I have never tried to properly imitate Rakoto Frah's playing, but – as for everyone – Malagasy flute music for me has always been the sound and style of Rakoto Frah's flute playing and that is the sound and playing style that I have been trying to approach with my Renaissance recorder. Further, Erick Manana with whom I am mainly learning and performing has been one of the closest companions of Rakoto Frah, has

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<sup>118</sup> I have often been given different names, all creating a kind of European version or German version of Rakoto Frah's name, such as "Rakoto Frau," "Rakoto Fräulein," or "Rakoto Françoise;" see for example comments on youtube and dailymotion videos: [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xb412o\\_erick-manana-et-jenny-fuhr\\_music](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xb412o_erick-manana-et-jenny-fuhr_music); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fPxPcfKgMI> (accessed 23.10.2010).



founded the group “Feo Gasy” with him and obviously is more than familiar with Rakoto Frah’s playing style. Ben Mandelson and Roger Armstrong in 1988 produced a recording with Rakoto Frah, entitled “Rakoto Frah. Flute Master of Madagascar.”<sup>119</sup> Mandelson writes in the sleeve notes to the album that there were many other flute players in the same tradition who were equally good, or some younger ones who one day would even be better, but who were holding themselves back to honour and respect to Rakoto Frah as in Madagascar the elders are always the elders.<sup>120</sup>

However, as stated earlier, according to my own experience, Rakoto Frah is still the most present when it comes to *sodina* music in Madagascar. I was also told by different musicians that Rakoto Frah always had many students around him in *Isotry*, almost like a kind of ‘school,’ which did not continue or his role was not taken over by someone else after his death. The only *sodina* player I met in Antananarivo is Rageorge (alias Georges Ranaivoson), himself former student of Rakoto Frah. The German producer Birger Gesthuisen just recently released a new album of Sammy’s new group “Samy Izy.”<sup>121</sup> Interestingly, on this recording, Sammy invited Rageorge to join in two songs with his flute. As written in the sleeve notes by Gesthuisen (2010), it was to honour and show respect to this ‘old master,’ who until now has never recorded on his own. However, just before Rageorge is mentioned in the sleeve notes, also Rakoto Frah appears in the text and Gesthuisen describes how Rakoto Frah, like *valiha* master Randafison or *hira gasy* director Ramilison, made their mark solely through their personalities, their expertise, and artistic skills.

These stories and this admiration for Rakoto Frah could have actually easily scared me off to get involved in Malagasy flute music as much as the musicians’ discourses of

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<sup>119</sup> The recording was released on CD in 1999 with an updated version of the sleeve notes by Ben Mandelson.

<sup>120</sup> Mandelson, Ben (1988, updated 1999), sleeve notes to CD: Rakoto Frah (1999): *Rakoto Frah. Flute Master of Madagascar*. GlobeStyle Records.

<sup>121</sup> Samy Izy (2010): *Tsara Madagasikara*. Frankfurt am Main, Network Medien GmbH.

It is remarkable that this CD and also the CD by Erick Manana mentioned earlier in this chapter („Made in Madagasikara“) contain the name of the country in the title. I have mentioned at the beginning of my thesis (chapter 2.1) that the marketability of the name “Madagascar” is a topic frequently raised by the musicians. Particularly interesting here is in both cases the use of the name in Malagasy language: “Madagasikara.” It would be interesting to conduct some further research on these albums (and similar cases) in order to see and find out who of the people involved have taken what kind of decisions with regard to marketability and why. Is the use of the word “Madagasikara” for example linked to notions within discourses on ‘world music,’ such as ‘authenticity’?

*vazahas* having difficulties within intercultural musical encounters or even failing in venturing into Malagasy musicking (see examples analysed in the first part of this chapter). However, through musicking myself and through performing especially for Malagasy audiences as much as through engaging in and listening to discourses, I have realised that it is not at all about becoming Malagasy or getting myself a ‘Malagasy soul’ – end even less about trying to become Rakoto Frah. Accepting, understanding, and finally following the idea of the *lova-tsofina* is also about creating and expressing your own musical personality through the music.

As described above, I am performing on my own Renaissance recorder and I am not trying to look like a *hira gasy* violin player, but holding my violin and my bow in the Western classical way. I am embracing new musical challenges whilst keeping and accepting my own ‘musical baggage.’ From what I have experienced in discussions with musicians and Malagasy audiences, but also through musicking, is that it seems to be essential for Malagasy people that they can identify with the music (“se retrouvent dans la musique” is the French expression people mostly use). When and how people are able to do so is difficult to define. However, according to my own experiences, accepting the *lova-tsofina* as the base for Malagasy music making, and learning and performing Malagasy music with Malagasy musicians using nothing but your ears – for the actually musicking as much as for listening to and engaging in discussions with the musicians – has proven to be a fruitful and possible way to engage and learn about Malagasy music making.

At the beginning of section 2 I said that the music the musicians I worked with play could best be understood as “Contemporary Malagasy music” as used by Randrianary (2001). One important element in this definition is the idea of a certain “openness” and “creation” (Randrianary 2001: 128). The projects of ‘malagasising’ music for example fit very well into this idea. Through my own experiences, I tend to think of Malagasy music more as a particular way of musicking, rather than a particular music.

My aim, as I stated clearly at the beginning of this chapter, was not to give a definition of Malagasy music or to give instructions to how to learn and play Malagasy music. My aim was to show how my analysis of discourses inform my musical experience, and how in turn, my analysis of experiences that I gain through musicking inform discourses. Instead

of seeing both as separated worlds or especially musical experiences as ‘untranslatable,’ I have tried to show that the analysis in both directions is useful and necessary for ethnomusicological research.

#### Outlook / further research possibilities

The examples I gave, as argued earlier, should be seen as a snapshot of my on-going research. Further research on Malagasy music is needed to further elucidate this underresearched phenomenon. My research through showing the importance of analysing discourses and musical experiences in a constant interrelation has raised questions and topics that could be taken on for further research, such as research which would specifically be investigating regional musical particularities. Here, it would be useful to research the music with regard to different elements and their interdependencies that my research has shown to be significant. These include the role of language, the different instruments and their particular playing technique and sound, body movements or dance to name but a few examples. Especially interesting would be to research these aspects with regard to rhythmical perception and to what I have described as a constant *opportunity* of binaries and ternaries, since musicians often argue that despite a shared rhythmical base, regional varieties depend on how this rhythmical structure is ‘filled,’ e.g. where the strong beats are. In general, it would also be interesting to pursue further research with musicians from other parts of the island who are not necessarily involved in or aiming at the international music market. Would the topic of ‘rhythm’ (or more specifically on the ‘6/8 rhythm’) be of significance in their discourses and experiences? With regard to the topic of ‘rhythm,’ my research has shown that integrating musical practices into the research and analysing *shared* musical experiences and discourses in an equal manner and interdependently is a possible way to question and challenge prevailing and often dominating Western discourses on music. It is a way of going beyond seemingly contradictory discourses and integrate musical experiences that do not only encompass both, me as a researcher and the musicians, but that are *shared* musical experiences as I explained in detail in chapter 2.2.

Throughout my thesis I have argued for the importance of integrating more musical practices into ethnomusicological research. As other research projects show, the analysis

of musical performances also allows for the integration of methods that draw from other fields, such as science, physics, or psychology:

I already mentioned Erick Manana's experience with a French technician in a studio. During the recording session, the technician was curious to find out about the fast percussion that Erick played with the Malagasy shaker called *koritsana*. The technician recorded it and analysed the sound diagram showing the real-time measure on his computer. It turned out that one triplet of the *koritsana* in itself was irregular and even a number of triplets in a row were all irregular and different from each other. However, after a few triplets, a pattern of these irregular triplets would repeat itself exactly.<sup>122</sup> Stobart and Cross (2000) in their study on Bolivian Easter songs have also looked into the possibilities of researching real timing. They write that:

“[w]hen the rhythmic values of individual notes were measured in milliseconds it was discovered that relationships between the durations of individual notes were often asymmetrical and variable, but that the pulse and durations of rhythmic groups (e.g. of two or three notes) were highly regular” (Stobart and Cross 2000: 72).

The two researchers further used real time measurement to investigate the *charango* (small type of guitar) accompaniment of “Easter songs.” They found out that the downstroke of the *charango*, which coincides with the pulse and the performer's footfall as they argue, is almost inaudible whereas the upstroke is sounded with much greater intensity. The latter heightens rhythmic tension and therefore leads to the tendency to perceive the upstroke as the pulse (Stobart and Cross 2000: 74).

These techniques might give insight into the interrelation of different elements in music with regard to accentuation, such as the playing techniques of instruments (example *charango* upstroke and downstroke). And it could also be applied to investigate other interrelations such as of language and accentuation or dance movements. For Malagasy music, this aspect would be especially interesting to pursue as many musicians, for example, argue that it is often in the fast percussion of the *koritsana* and in the interrelation of the *koritsana* with where the singing voice enters that regional musical

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<sup>122</sup> Conversation with Erick Manana, 1.3.2009.

styles differ and can be identified accordingly.<sup>123</sup> However, I am not sure to what extent conclusions drawn from real time measuring could for example be used to learn to play the music.

Yet another approach to research musical performances that uses real time measuring, also with a particular focus on rhythm, is a method that investigates the role of ‘entrainment,’ a concept originally identified by Dutch physicist Christiaan Huygens already in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Ethnomusicologist Martin Clayton in an interdisciplinary collaboration with other scholars (among them Ian Cross, mentioned above) is the first who has applied this concept to ethnomusicological research (Clayton, Sager, Will 2005: 2).<sup>124</sup> The interdisciplinary team of scholars has developed a method that correlates musicological description, ethnography and the analysis of movements of both performers and listeners through the analysis of video recordings. On the official website of their research project “Experience and meaning in music performance,” the project description says:

“The research concerns the role of "entrainment" (i.e. the synchronisation of musicians and listeners to musical rhythms); gestural communication and movement; and the relationships between these psycho-physiological processes, and processes of meaning construction. By correlating musicological description, ethnography and analysis of the movement of both performers and listeners, members of the project team investigate how the evidence of bodily movement relates to the formal analysis of music, and how both of these articulate with verbal reports on musical experience and with accounts of musical meaning.”<sup>125</sup>

Clayton, Sager and Will (2005) in a paper resulting out of this research project argue that entrainment has been proven to be a powerful tool also in research areas of ethnomusicology, for example as it has been inspiring new perspectives on research concerning ‘metre’ (Clayton, Sager, and Will 2005: 20). Therefore, research on Malagasy music following or inspired by a model of ‘entrainment’ could be useful and highly interesting as it offers further ways to tackle the issue of the ‘6/8 rhythm’ and debates on rhythmic perception in Malagasy music making. Such a method would further go in hand

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<sup>123</sup> Various discussions with different musicians; this idea also came up in the discussion with the “Madagascar AllStars” at the TnMundi Conference in Southampton, October 2010.

<sup>124</sup> For a complementary assessment of this topic, see Clayton’s article (2008) in which he argues that we need to focus more on the “human experience of sound” within ethnomusicological research.

<sup>125</sup> <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/experience/about.htm> (accessed 6.10.2010).

with some of my main theoretical and methodological concerns: the integration of both, the analysis of musical practices and of discourses about these experiences and a focus on individuals and individuals' experiences. Such a method also avoids the risk of essentialising music, e.g. not explaining and analysing music using but Western music notation. Rather: a model of 'entrainment,' as Clayton, Saga, and Will (2005) argue,

“(...) suggests we look at engagement with music not simply as a process of encoding and decoding information, but of embodied interaction and ‘tuning-in’ to musical stimuli” (Clayton, Saga, and Will 2005: 21).

The authors assume that 'entrainment' is a factor in any interpersonal interaction and communication and argue that research on 'entrainment' with regard to music was however special in the way that 'entrainment' that occurs in certain kinds of musicking seems to afford particularly precise synchronisation between individuals' behaviours. They believe that 'entrainment research' in ethnomusicology and the use of methodologies that are empirical, experimental and ethnographic at the same time may also offer useful contribution to ethnomusicological debates on musical meaning or emotion in music (Clayton, Saga and Will 2005: 21-22). A very interesting aspect of their research is that they ask the question of how processes of 'entrainment' vary individually and with culture. They write that

“[e]ntrainment research in ethnomusicology relies upon the integration of musical, cognitive, and cultural theory, thereby allowing a broader description of how musical experience, while individually unique in any case, is nevertheless always social. Through exploring the phenomena of entrainment, ethnomusicologists may be able to better understand how musical sound serves as an interface that connects selves – viscerally and cognitively – to society” (Clayton, Saga and Will 2005: 22).

In that respect, their approach of integrating musical performances with a focus on entrainment would go in hand with yet another of my main concerns: whilst following a focus on the individual and the individual's experiences, it would allow for the integration of *shared* musical experiences that encompass the researcher and the researched in the same way.

This short excursion into other research methods has shown again that the integration of musical practices into ethnomusicological research is important and useful and that it is yet a field to be further explored.

## Conclusion

In this closing chapter of section 3, I have continued to analyse the musicians' discourses, here with a particular focus on their musical experience, i.e. how they experience 'rhythm' when musicking. As throughout the previous chapter, I have particularly looked at issues of identity: Whereas musicians very much emphasise regional particularities in the music when they talk about composing and projects of 'malagasising' music, in their discourses on rhythmical perception (tapping feet, counting and clapping) and in their discourses on their experiences within intercultural musical encounters differences are clearly stressed between Malagasy and non-Malagasy people, hence emphasising a collective Malagasy (musical) identity. I have also shown that many musicians reflect upon strategies of how to sell their music to the international music market and that their perception of it also shines through in their identity discourses, touching upon regional and collective, and local and global references within their music.

The second part of the chapter has focused on my musical practices, showing how discourses and musical experiences interrelate and how I have analysed both interdependently. I have given concrete examples of how engaging in discussions, listening to and analysing the musicians' discourses has informed my musical practices and how in turn, my musical experiences have likewise and at the same time informed my analysis of the discourses. Although section 3 has been 'divided,' with the first two chapters focussing on the analysis of the musicians' discourses and the last chapter focussing on musical experiences, with the examples I have demonstrated that information constantly flows in both directions and that this 'division' should not be understood as a chronological order. Further, the examples should be seen as a snapshot of my on-going research as I am still involved in both, musicking and performing and in engaging in discussions and interviewing musicians.

The first two examples I have given are of crucial importance as all other examples relate to them: I have identified and stressed the importance of the *lova-tsofina* as the base for Malagasy music making. Following from this, I have tackled the issue of the '6/8 rhythm,' arguing that through what I have experienced through both, discourses and musical experiences, I would speak of a constant *opportunity* of binaries and ternaries in Malagasy music; however not meaning that both are always necessarily audibly present

for everyone. Rather, rhythmical perception can often be very differently experienced by different people. Further, accentuation or the perception of where the strong beats are, for example, are closely related to other elements, such as language, body movements, or the instruments and their playing techniques as I have tried to demonstrate with the examples I have given. I have highlighted different interdependencies of elements within the music and the music making, arguing that ‘rhythm’ in this sense cannot be understood separately as for instance a particular ‘rhythm’ (or metre) notated in a musical score. Integrating musical practices into my research and analysing discourses and musical experiences in a constant interrelation has proven to be a fruitful approach to research Malagasy music, especially as it has been a possible way to go beyond the study of seemingly contradictory discourses. I have outlined further possible research areas, such as research specifically focussing on regional particularities in Malagasy music, also with regard to the topic of ‘rhythm’ and the issue of a rhythmical structure of binaries and ternaries.

Although the realisation and appliance of a performance approach within ethnomusicology is still rather rare, recent research projects show that the integration of musical practices into research has led scholars to try out and integrate other methods, such as the use of the concept of ‘entrainment’ in music research (Clayton, Saga, and Will 2005; Clayton 2008) or real-time measuring (e.g. Stobart and Cross 2000).

Regarding the latter, we must be aware that this method should not prevent us from listening to the voices of the musicians we work with and remain open to the limitations imposed by our own (often prevailing and dominating) theories and approaches to music.





#### Section 4 - Conclusion

In my thesis I argue for the importance of integrating musical practices into ethnomusicological research. My own experiences of making music have therefore become an essential focus of this study.

I have shown that by interlinking discourses on music and musical practices, and by analysing both as constantly interrelated, it becomes possible to challenge prevailing and dominating Western discourses on music. Most approaches to musical research have been informed by a Western perspective, the major analytical tool of which remains musical notation. This approach has been widely criticised, especially with regard to studies on African music as it is seen as a constantly seeking out difference and thereby ignoring indigenous theories and understandings of music (Agawu 2003). The exclusive use of Western notation has further been identified as carrying the risk of “essentialising music” (Bohlman 1993). Scholars have therefore stressed the importance and necessity of focussing on discourses in our research. Firstly, studies of this kind offer insights into how discourses on music emerge and by whom they are being controlled (Rice 2003). Secondly, it is only by carefully listening to the voices of the people we work with that we get to know and learn how to recognise their own conceptualisations and ideas about music and musicking (Agawu 2003).

In my research I identify competing and even contradictory discourses in relation to “Contemporary Malagasy music” (Randrianary 2001). This poses challenges, but also opens up new ways of understanding. It was through conducting ethnographic fieldwork and narrative interviews, which I used as main methodological approach that I was able to observe that the topic of ‘rhythm’ is constantly present in the musicians’ discourses, but that very different meanings can be attached to it. Musicians persistently use the term of ‘6/8 rhythm,’ which as a concept is based in Western music theory and grounded in the idea of musical notation (Arom 1991, Dudley 1996). At the same time, musicians emphasise that they see the base of Malagasy music in the Malagasy concept of oral tradition, the *lova-tsofina* (*lova* = heritage; *sofina* = ear).

There seems to be a contradiction if one understands the Western concept of ‘6/8 rhythm’ and the Malagasy concept of *lova-tsofina* as in opposition to each other. Going beyond the statement of difference and contradiction I decided to investigate this phenomenon

further by bringing in musical practices as a means to explore new ways of understanding.

I have suggested that we should not understand our discourses on music and music making as separated from our experiences of musicking. They are often treated as two worlds apart where 'translation' across appears as an impossible task. Rather, in my research I have focussed on the interrelation and interdependence of discourses and musical practices: On the one hand I have examined the ways in which our discussions on the music and music making informed our musical practices and helped me to analyse musical experiences, my own and those of others. On the other hand, gaining *shared* musical experiences informed our discussions on music and musical performances and thus helped me to analyse the discourses.

In chapter 2.1 I have shown that in Western theories the term and concept of 'rhythm' is also far from being clearly defined. To the contrary: across academic disciplines the topic of 'rhythm' has caused debates and confusion. This is particularly true for the field of African Music Studies. Almost all scholars who conducted research on African musics so far have stressed 'rhythm' as an exceptionally important aspect to study. This has led to the invention of new terms and/or special music scores by Western scholars. It has been criticised that through their work and terminological creations related to this particular topic research has persistently furthered the search for 'the Other' and has undermined indigenous understandings of music (Agawu 2003).

The topic of 'rhythm' is constantly present in the Malagasy musicians' discourses on their music and appears as an essential theme within their discussions and negotiations on identity issues. However, although the particular term and concept of '6/8 rhythm' is persistently used, it is also highly contested by the musicians. In my research I have therefore considered it important and useful to focus on *individual* usages, understandings, and experiences – an approach that has been identified as particularly fruitful and useful for ethnomusicological research undertaken at present time (Rice 2003).

In chapter 2.2 I have given a detailed account of my theoretical framework and methodological approach. I have argued that it is only through the integration of both, musical practices and analysis of discourses that currently debated issues concerning ethnographic methodology in ethnomusicological research can be addressed appropriately. Many ethnomusicologists agree that we can gain significant knowledge through musicking and through integrating these experiences into our research (e.g. Titon 1997). However, scholars describe the immense difficulty they have to express in words what they experience musically (e.g. Seeger 1977, Rice 1997) – a difficulty that is shared and expressed by many of the Malagasy musicians in a similar way. Hence, despite a continuing debate within the discipline in which the need for more performance-based approaches to research and the integration of musical practices into our analyses are suggested, not many scholars have actually pursued this aim (Baily 2008). The so-called “new fieldwork” in ethnomusicology suggests understanding ‘the field’ as an *experience* rather than a place (Hellier-Tinoco 2003). Scholars stress the need to be self-reflexive and strongly encourage researchers to constantly reflect upon the relationships we build with the people we research (Hellier-Tinoco 2003, Armbruster 2008). By focussing on individuals and individual experiences as proposed in Rice’s model of a “subject-centred ethnography” (Rice 2003), I have aimed at creating a *shared* space of experiences that includes the musicians and me as a researcher in an equal manner. I have integrated both, the musicians’ individual ‘theories’ on their music and their experiences of musicking, and my own experiences of engaging in discussions/discourses and of *sharing* musical experiences.

My research can be seen as a first attempt to approach Malagasy music by using a bottom-up perspective. Through focussing on individual experiences I have started to tackle the most prominent issues which emerge in current discourses on Contemporary Malagasy music. My own approach to doing research and conducting fieldwork has been informed by an interdisciplinary perspective. I have combined ethnomusicological methods, such as ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, including shared musical experiences, with discourse-analytical methods. It is only through this approach that we can follow Agawu’s demand for a “*presumption* of sameness” (Agawu 2003) - a research attitude that will prevent us from ignoring the voices of the people with whom

we work and make us aware of the risk of imposing a Western perspective and approach. At the same time this approach also prevents us from struggling with our role and task as researchers, suggesting self-reflexivity and the integration of our own experiences. We must accept that we as researchers are always part of the research context. The emphasis lies on *shared* experiences and research that encompass the researcher and the researched in equal terms (Rice 2003).

In Chapter 2.3 I have given concrete examples of situations that I encountered and experiences that I made during my fieldwork. By outlining the development of my research including that of my musical practices, I have highlighted important aspects of the research context that I have taken into consideration and constantly reflected upon in my analyses.

One significant aspect, for example, has been my double role as a researcher and a musician. All musicians I worked with are aware that I am a classically trained musician. Furthermore, French - a second language to me and to the musicians - has been the main language of communication throughout my research. Despite my emphasis on being only a research student and a musician, many musicians have seen in me a potential window to the Western music market, an experience and challenge that other scholars have also described (e.g. Mallet 2009). I have worked with Malagasy musicians in Antananarivo, Madagascar and others who are based in Europe. I have noted that all of them are to some extent involved in and aim to sell their music to the international 'world music market.' More and more Malagasy musicians are involved in transnational music projects for which the capital Antananarivo has a vital and central function. It has not only been described as a multicultural city and "foyer of immigration and cultural opportunity" ("foyer d'immigration et d'ouverture culturelle" Randrianary 2001), but as a "cultural hub" and "passage oblig  " for all musicians and artists from the island (Kiw  n and Meinhof 2011). Despite these rather positive sounding remarks, the country is currently suffering from a severe political crisis which also has an effect on the musicians' conditions of life and work. An already inadequate cultural infrastructure of the capital (e.g. Fuhr 2006) has deteriorated even more since the beginning of the disturbances in January 2009. Malagasy musicians based in Europe have been restricted in their ability to

return to Madagascar for concerts and artists in Antananarivo have been struggling very hard to find opportunities to perform. All Malagasy musicians I worked with remark regretfully that Malagasy music has not yet been very successful on the international music market. It is within these chances and challenges, describable as a context of “roots and routes” (to borrow a comparison used by Clifford 1997) that the musicians constantly negotiate issues of identity. It is through the discourses on their music and their experiences of musicking that they create identities, constantly moving and shifting within a continuum of regional and local, collective and global references. I have focussed on this continuum throughout my analysis section 3.

In chapter 3.1 I have analysed in detail the musicians’ individual usage of the term and concept of ‘6/8 rhythm.’ My aim has not been to find out or even judge whether this particular term is suitable for the description of Malagasy music. I have rather focussed on how exactly and in what kind of circumstances musicians make use of this term and what aspects of the particular research context come into play, such as the role of Antananarivo or my double role as a Western researcher and a musician.

The musicians’ individual usage of ‘6/8 rhythm’ varies to a great deal, starting for example with the fact that some musicians use the concept without further reflecting upon it and others use it but immediately declare it a foreign concept that generally only ‘music theorists’ would use. There is no agreed terminology for music or rhythm in particular on which the musicians could draw. This seems to give the term and concept of ‘6/8 rhythm’ a significant role in the musicians’ attempt and desire to sell their music to an international public. Whereas for example some musicians argue that in order to properly sell the music there is a need to further explain it to a foreign audience, others rather see a marketing advantage in so far as it makes the music appear complex, almost incomprehensible and hence ‘exotic’ to foreigners. Within their discourses on how to best ‘market’ Malagasy music, musicians take up topics and notions that are also discussed and analysed in academic studies of ‘world music’ discourses, such as ‘authenticity’, ‘hybridity’, or the ‘local’ (e.g. Taylor 1997, Stoke 2004).

In chapter 3.2 I have analysed in detail the musicians' own ideas and theories on the origin and meaning of 'rhythm' in Madagascar. I have shown how their individual narratives underline the importance of the concept of oral tradition, the *lova-tsofina*. I have identified a set of different topoi that have come to the fore within the musicians' discourses and that are all highly interrelated: musicians relate the topic of 'rhythm' to the Malagasy environment, to everyday life, to language and dance, they point at different (musical) influences from abroad, and also refer to emotional and spiritual ideas. Despite these various topoi being interrelated, my analysis has shown that again, musicians negotiate identities and draw comparisons on different levels: between the African mainland and Madagascar, between Madagascar and the Western world, or between different regions on the island itself. Whereas with regard to language, dance and also to the topos of everyday life, for example, musicians rather emphasise a collective 'pan-Malagasy' identity, they stress regional particularities with regard to the environment. I have analysed those negotiations among the musicians and with me as a researcher and musician, presenting their individual perspectives and 'theories' as detailed as possible as it is also these discourses that have informed our music making and my learning to play Malagasy music. At the same time it is true to say that the experiences which I gained through musicking have helped me to better understand these discourses – an interplay that has been the focus of my last chapter.

In chapter 3.3 I have demonstrated with concrete examples how I analysed the interrelation between musical practices and discourses on Contemporary Malagasy music. I have shown that through the integration of both, I was able to tackle some of the central and often contested issues that came to the fore in my research, such as the topic of the '6/8 rhythm' and the associated rhythmic structure of overlapping binaries and ternaries. A very obvious and yet very important example of the interplay between musical practices and discourses is that I only started to learn and play Malagasy music without any kind of written notation and using nothing but my own ears, because the musicians had stressed so clearly the importance of the *lova-tsofina* for Malagasy music making. At the same time it is true to say that if I had not pursued the *lova-tsofina* on a practical level, I would have never musically experienced other important aspects and

interplays between different elements in the music that the musicians talk about. Musicians, for example, mention the importance of language or particular playing techniques of instruments for accentuation in music. Searching for, and experimenting myself with these ideas musically has then also helped me to better understand the musicians' discourses on their own musical experiences. If I had merely used Western music notation as my main analytical tool, I would have probably remained ignorant of these kinds of interplays within the music that the musicians themselves stress so much. Looking at the interrelation of discourses and musical practices has shown that 'rhythm' in Malagasy music cannot be regarded as a separate element as in Western notation, where '6/8 rhythm' as a particular metre is indicated at the beginning of a music score suggesting an already determined accentuation. I have argued that the 'shared rhythmic base' in Malagasy music that many musicians talk about could probably best be understood as a constant *opportunity* of binaries and ternaries. There does not seem to be a fixed metre, i.e. some kind of 'authoritarian text' behind the music that determines accentuation. Rather: there are different interrelated elements that are all related to 'rhythm' and that define where the musicians feel the strong beats, such as language/lyrics, playing techniques of instruments, or body/dance movements to name a few examples.

Hardly anything so far has been written about "Contemporary Malagasy Music" (Randrianary 2001) and more research is needed. Most studies on music in Madagascar have taken a focus on one or the other particular regional musical style (e.g. Schmidhofer 1995, Mauro 2001, Vatan 2004, Mallet 2009). Regional varieties and particularities have also come to the fore within my research, however approached through a different angle that opens up further possible research areas. I have shown that musicians emphasise the interplay of different elements within the music. And it is very often through these interrelations of musical elements that musicians tend to explain and point at regional musical varieties while emphasising some kind of shared rhythmic base in the music. Examples of regional divergences are the musicians' descriptions of different tempi, of different regional dialects in Malagasy language, their descriptions of the particularities of regional dances or of regional instruments and their playing techniques. I suggest that



further research on these regional particularities will only be possible by further integrating both, discourses *and* musical practices.

My research has demonstrated the importance of integrating musical practices into ethnomusicological research. The usefulness of this approach has been confirmed by other recent research projects as it also allows for the integration of further research methods, such as Stobart and Cross' use of real-time measurement (Stobart and Cross 2000) or Clayton, Saga, and Will's application of the concept of 'entrainment' to music (Clayton, Saga, and Will 2005; see also Clayton 2008).

My thesis has shown that there are possibilities that we should grasp to integrate knowledge and experience that we gain through musicking into our academic works. If we accept that we as researchers are always part of the research context we will be able to embrace self-reflexivity as an essential process of our research. If we accept the need for creating a *shared* space of experience including the 'researcher' *and* the 'researched,' we will be able to listen to and integrate the voices of those we work with. At last, as Agawu (2003) argues, it is only through embracing sameness that paradoxically we can gain a better view on difference (Agawu 2003: 67). Thus "an embrace of sameness might also prompt a fresh critique on essentialism" (Agawu 2003: 169).

## Appendix I

### English translation of interview quotes (section 3)

Please note that these translations are verbatim, rendering the text as closely as possible to the original rather than attempting to achieve stylistic perfection.

#### Chapter 3.1

[1] “Everyone has his own way of seeing things. But also of adopting things. And this also depends on one’s ear. Obviously everything depends on the ear. Because if you don’t use your ear, you’ll never get a sense of rhythm. But anyway, having a ‘musical ear’ is a natural thing, everyone has it! Everyone has a ‘musical ear,’ it’s all about the way you’re going to use it. Yeah, about the habit!” (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

[2] “It’s very free. Our rhythm, it’s not a measured rhythm like in Western music. It is rather experiential rhythms. It is from experiences that they get this particular rhythm.” (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

[3] “We have a rhythm that unites us. (...) This rhythm, it’s always...I always see the 6/8. You see, the (he demonstrates). You find this everywhere on the island!” (Interview Sammy, 23.11.2007)

[4] Bilo: “The real rhythm in Malagasy is the 6/8. But there are also 6/8 that are a bit slow, it depends on the regions, that are a bit slow, there are rhythms that are a bit exciting, a bit faster than the other.”

Jenny: “So it is the tempo that varies.”

Bilo: “Yes, it’s the tempo that varies, but the rhythm is the 6/8. And that’s what reunites all Malagasy musics. But everyone has his way of...”

Jenny: “That means that the 6/8, you can find it really everywhere, even in the South...”

Bilo: “Even in the South to the North. You see, there is the kilalaka, it’s the 6/8. There is also the hira gasy from Tananarive, that’s the 6/8. There is also the kidogo from Fianarantsoa, that’s the 6/8. There is also the salegy, the malesa from the North. All these are 6/8.” (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

[5] “Well, we, our idea, if you have listened to the pieces earlier, it’s true that in one piece we have seen a bit of everything, but that is why for me, the 6/8 rhythm here in Madagascar, the same cadence, in fact with the same cadence, you can integrate everything, all the accents of the tsapiky, the salegy, the bassesa etc. So, that’s us. That is why everything is in one piece; in fact all the musicians of all the regions can express their style. That’s it.” (Interview Justin, 23.11.2007)

[6] “It is strange, when I listen to a song, be it pop, be it techno, be it hip-hop or be it blues, and if I immediately take my guitar to play that song, it comes out as 6/8. I can’t anymore...I can play a 4/4, but it’s not my inspiration. It’s not a problem if I play, but I think it’s nicer if... (Everyone laughs.)” (Interview Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

[7] “Me, I am not a theoretician, just some bits of music theory when I was young. I play like this. It’s in the practice. So, I think it’s a bit difficult for me to explain.” (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

[8] “Yes, well listen, already there is...yes, the music that I play, the salegy, for the theoreticians...like Jenny...when you write it, the rhythmical metre is the 6/8. Yeah, a compound metre. At the base it appears to be ‘square’ 1, 2, 3, 4, but in fact it is 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.” (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

[9] Hajazz: “In general, it is the music pros who call it 6/8. But it’s a bit mixed, you can also say 4/4. (He demonstrates) 1, 2, 3, 4 (...) Or 6/8 or 12/8, I don’t know. It’s between the three.”

Jenny: “But, for example, when you rehearse with other Malagasy musicians and you talk...if ever it happens that you talk...”

Hajazz: “No no, it’s rare to find the...the...it is the connoisseur musicians who always call it 6/8 like this.” (Interview Hajazz, 12.8.2008)

[10] Jenny: “But there is still...I don’t know when there is a rehearsal and you talk about rhythm in that way, do you use words for...(Everyone laughs). Or you don’t talk?”

Ricky: “Yes, that’s the problem.” (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

[11] Bebey: “But the rhythm, every time we say that it’s a 6/8, it strikes Jenny, when we (he taps his feet), when we play the rhythm.”

Jenny: “I have filmed, for example, people tapping feet during concerts and in a vazaha/Malagasy audience, if you look at the feet, it is never the same.”

Bebey: “Never! It is never the same. We, we have our thing. And in fact, we, all the time we have our accents on the 6/8. In fact that’s...that’s what she is searching for. And I tell her ‘You can’t do this, Jenny’ (everyone laughs) ‘Because that’s Malagasy, in fact it’s an esprit.’ And then, she sticks her tongue out at me when I say this. But in fact, it must be true, somehow. Even Radonné, Donné, we explained it to him and then we called the other one...”

Jenny: “Fanaiky.”

Bebey: “Fanaiky, he was there, so I said ‘Fanaiky, come and show me a 6/8.’ And he was there and Jenny as well...we...in fact Donné, Fanaiky and me, when we play the 6/8, we always have the same...”

Papay: “Tempo.”

Bebey: “...accent. In fact, it’s the accents, because...”

Jenny: “No, I think, if I have understood well, in fact I think it is not a 6/8, but we call it 6/8.”

Bebey: “We, we call it 6/8, but in fact, it is not a 6/8.”

Papay: “It is really bizarre, also the tempo and then the way of counting.” (Interview with Papay and Bebey, 21.7.2008)

[12] “The Malagasy rhythmic symbiosis! Me, at the moment I also ask the question, is it the 6/8 or the 12/8? So we go on, what is exactly the difference and what is the particularity of the Malagasy 12/8 in comparison to the European 12/8? What is the

particularity of the Malagasy 12/8 in comparison to the Africans? That's quite a research. You can't just say it like this! I think, I am really careful with everything I am saying, because it's really, it's very very musical, very technical. You have to be careful (he laughs). You can't say the Malagasy rhythm is like this. You can't say that, because it varies from one region to the other." (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

[13] "We didn't speak of the word salegy before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When you speak of salegy, you need to think: Malagasy folklore, in a 6/8 metre, accompanied by instruments that come from the West. We started to use the word salegy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the accordion arrived here. I wasn't there. So, when the musicians at the time played the accordion, they tried to play their folklore with it and that's where the word salegy was born. Because before the arrival of the accordion...well, the Malagasies, they played a capella. They clapped their hands or there were drums, the tube zither valiha, at the time you did not speak of the word salegy. You would say "chant Sakalava" or "osiky Tsimihety," "hira Betsimisaraka" or "hira Merina." That's how it was called. But when the accordion arrived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, you started to hear the word salegy." (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

[14] "There are also other traditional rhythms, other traditional songs in a 4/4 metre for example. But here, we speak of salegy. In the East, for example, they call it bassesa, but it's the same of course. In the South, they don't call it salegy, and the Vezo from Tuléar, the Antandroy, they play the same music as the ancestors of the salegy, with the marovany, valiha, and accordion. They call it jihé. It's the same thing." (Jaojoby, quoted in Terramorsi and Rajaonarison 2004: 173)

[15] Jaojoby: "Yes, since...I'm sorry...since the salegy is really the federal rhythm of all Malagasies. All Malagasies know how to play the salegy."

Jenny: "And all Malagasies call it salegy?"

Jaojoby: "Not necessarily. But if you say that the salegy comes from the North, that's true as well!" (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

[16] "Yes, it's the salegy that has travelled everywhere in Madagascar, because now it is one of the most successful musics of Madagascar, at our present time, it's the most successful music of Madagascar." (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

[17] "No, you know, the salegy, it...it comes from one region, that's true. For example if you speak of Mahajanga, the salegy comes from the North. But in the South you call this tsapiky. It's the same thing! You see? If you take the (he demonstrates), you see, it's the same thing! Do you understand what I mean? You take the High Plateaux, there is something which is called vakisaova. The vakisaova it's similar with the hand clapping, it goes (he demonstrates). It's always like this." (Interview Sammy, 23.11.2007)

[18] "Well, with this style here, I have used a bit the style of the vakodrazana of the High Plateaux. It means that it is more or less the 6/8 of the High Plateaux, it's not the salegy... (...) But, this is really the 6/8 of the High Plateaux, in a way it's the salegy of

the High Plateaux. Because every region has its style of salegy.” (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

[19] “In fact, it depends, already the salegy, it’s not a musical genre. L’antsa, that’s the genre. In general, the salegy, that’s a way of dancing. Historically, it’s like this.” (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

[20] “Well, there is the salegy music. If you listen to a salegy music which is there and you want to dance, you dance the kawitchi. That’s the way you dance the salegy, the name of the dance is kawitchi (...) But the salegy stays a rhythm, but within the salegy, there are many things.” (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

[21] “In fact...in general the salegy is a song. It’s a traditional song from the North of Madagascar. So, within the salegy, there are many things. The salegy is a way of speaking, a way of living. The way of living. We live within the salegy. So as a song, there are songs, traditional songs, there is percussion, there is dance, especially dance. So singing and dancing, that’s the salegy.” (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

[22] Bilo: “Yes, the people use it in different ways, because if you say salegy, it’s only the rhythm. You see?”

Jenny: “It’s the name of the rhythm?”

Bilo: “The name of the rhythm.” (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

[23] “But here, we have changed the rhythm a bit like Youssour N’Dour, Baaba Maal and the others with whom you can dance. But if you really listen to how they are doing it (he laughs) wow! That’s difficult! And in Malagasy music, I do this as well. I’m trying to find it.” (Interview Sammy, 23.11.2007)

[24] Ricky: “(...) what is the history of rhythm in Madagascar. Maybe that’s why we are stuck in comparison to the Malians, the Senegalese, the Brazilians...”

Jean-Claude: “Maybe that’s it, indeed...once I was asked, why does Malagasy music have difficulties to get out there? Because it is too rich, but wait, what do you mean, it’s too rich?” (Everyone laughs)

Ricky: “Maybe that’s it.”

Jean-Claude: “You see, you take a precious stone from the earth, there are many here in Madagascar. For example, take a stone, there are many bits and pieces, it’s completely broken, there are bits, but it’s still a precious stone. It’s a bit like the 550kg emerald that was found in Madagascar. A precious stone. So we go to the market, we find people who buy jewellery and they, oh la la, there are plenty of bits and pieces, it’s a mess, I don’t buy it. Even though you could make thousands of jewellery pieces with it. Well, Malagasy music is like that. The Malagasy rhythm. You need to take it and then cut it so that the people appreciate it.” (Interview Ricky and Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

[25] “Maybe in Europe for the time being we have not yet understood this. But once it works...the rhythm in Africa, that’s what is most important, it’s very, very rich. If the African, Malagasy rhythm...well, it’s African, had as beautiful melodies as the Beatles

and others... music would be happening here. It's only about putting the melody onto that rhythm. And there we go...everything is open." (Interview Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

[26] Papay: "I have thought about why Malagasy music never manages to break through..."

Jenny: "To really get out there?"

Papay: "To make proper expensive showbiz. Maybe it's because of this monotony, because people, there are some people who like the melodic side in music. And there are people who like...what can I say...choruses or things like that. And maybe it's because of that monotony (...). Before I had hopes with Sivy Mahasaky...I've listened a lot to Malagasy music and I really liked it. But what I realised is that there is some energy missing. I mean what the vakisaova and the hira gasy do..."

Bebey: "Here we go, that energy! It's true what he is saying!"

Papay: "And that is why I have tried to group together hira gasy and vakodrazana people, well, because there are people who play Malagasy music in their own way, that's not bad. But what they are missing is the energy!" (Interview Papay and Bebey, 21.7.2008)

[27] "In fact that's what should really work and that was a good idea. This must be...you know, when the people watch this at a festival in Germany, they will understand something. They are not....they don't have to make an effort to understand. They will immediately understand, because there is something of 'theirs' in this thing." (Interview Papay and Bebey, 21.7.2008)

[28] "Besides, I always advice my Malagasy colleagues the following: 'if you want to break through, you need to make it gasy-gasy, as Malagasy as you can,' because that's what the rest of the world likes, that's what they expect from the Malagasy artists." (Jaojoby, cited in Terramorsi and Rajaonarison 2004: 185)

[29] "Well, I always advice them: 'make Malagasy music, make it well, that will be your passport, your flight ticket.'" (Jaojoby, cited in Terramorsi and Rajaonarison 2004: 187)

## **Chapter 3.2**

[30] "It's the environment, because you can also find the 6/8 in American jazz, Miles Davis, he's been playing it ever since, all the big stars in jazz, Hendrix, Carlos Santana plays the 6/8 until today. But their vision is different to that of the Malagasies, and it is the environment in Madagascar which makes the 6/8 specific and makes that a guy like Santana, who is a master of the 6/8, dreams of coming here." (Interview Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

[31] "But it comes from Madagascar. That means that we are on an island that we call the Malagasies and as I explained to you, it depends on each region where it is. It is like a chameleon. If the chameleon falls onto a green plant, it will become green. If it is on a brown plant, it will become brown. That means that it depends on the region, on the soil, on its home village, where it is. And that is where inspiration comes in. It is because of the soil. It inspires them." (Interview Sammy, 23.11.2007)

[32] “Because if an Antandroy, for example, if an Antandroy plays something rhythmically and melody and harmonically, it is not the same as from Fianarantsoa, just next to Tuléar and Fort Dauphin. Because there the environment is a bit...a bit vast and big, you see? So, they have the possibility to make different rhythms...rhythms...and at the same time to create some melodies with the rhythms. (...) Yes, because it is not the same groove (he claps his hands at the same time). It’s not the same groove. There, it is (he demonstrates), as you saw...you see...when you watch the zebus, things like that behind you and the rhythm that symbolises the cattle and the zebus. But here it is rather calm and very wavy. So, in my opinion, it is in relation to the mountains, the stairs, things like that. (...) All Malagasy people (he demonstrates). And this, this makes everybody move, same...same groove, same sensibility. But if we enter into the specificity of the environment, there you see that it is rather Antanosy, even if they play kilalaka, same thing, but there is a different expression in relation to the sensibility and the environment.” (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

[33] “And I start there, you know in this region where these people live? It is their source of inspiration, the environment. Their source of inspiration. So they use the climate of the environment acoustically. They also build the instruments from this environment. So it depends on the environment. As the people say, they like responsorial songs, songs that respond to each other. Because the High Plateaux, it is a region with a highly uneven terrain, there are many mountains. And they play echo. (He demonstrates) There is one who starts and the rest who responds. It’s the environment that does that. In contrary, if you go to the South, it is bush, you have the savannah and the bush, and there the songs are rather monotonous. (...) It depends on the environment. It is a base that is very well known. I think it is a bit like everywhere in the world. For the people of the forest, well, it is in their songs that you hear the chirping of the birds, the...they like this, they do this.” (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

[34] “Let’s say that on the Coast it is hotter, and we are more...he? (He laughs) Oh yes! In the High Plateaux, we are there on the Plateaux, we are rather into meditation. Yes, you can look far. I don’t say that this is right, eh? It’s my opinion! (He laughs)” (Interview Jaobjoby, 21.8.2008)

[35] “I don’t know. Maybe it’s a matter of temperature. A matter of temperature and of...of... (...) That’s it. And I have asked myself if it was maybe because of this...I don’t know. I have not made an analysis, but just a conclusion like this. But maybe there is an impact in terms of temperature, and the altitude and position of the sun. I don’t know...this has, this has...an impact on how our brain works and how we feel. That is rhythm!” (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

[36] “But when I was in Africa, West Africa, there was also a rhythm that I didn’t get. They have certain, certain...rhythmical compositions, off-beats that I don’t even manage to listen to or to hear. So, the explanation that I have come up with...it’s a question of orientation, spatial orientation...at what time the sun positions itself and this positioning...this has to do with something cosmic and spatial. This generates many

reactions...reactions within the person's coordination and reflection." (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

[37] "Because the sun is in the rhythm. The frequency in which it returns and everything. And when I was in France for the first time in summer, I was in Montpellier. (...) I was immediately confused. Seeing the sun at ten o'clock in the evening, I was completely lost, at the time when I saw this for the first time, because it troubled my rhythmical habit. And so, dance and music is the conclusion and result of all this, I think." (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

[38] "The salegy that's...how do you say? It's a way of living. You see, the salegy is a way of living. So, we live the salegy...for us, if you are happy, you sing. You are upset, you sing. You cook, you sing. You always sing the salegy. So it's a way of living." (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

[39] "I would say, I would really say that Malagasies are all musicians. We are born for the music! Because as soon as someone starts playing a rhythm, trrrrr!" (Interview Sammy, 23.11.2007)

[40] "Everyone can identify with this musical structure. It is very easy for everyone to adapt. (...) In reality the universality of this music, it is not an ethnocentric interpretation as certain hypothesis suggest. But it is just the result of a synthesis of civilisation. (...) Because it's a metre composed in reality and that adapts to all other metres." (Interview Samy, 7.12.2007)

[41] "Yes the 6/8, because I will explain a phenomenon to you. The life of the Malagasies, it is regulated by the clock of nature. So, it is intimately affiliated with everyday life. The Malagasy clock; that's when the cock crows or when the sun raises its head, that's it. So everything is...how can I put it...everything is regulated in relation to what we call the clock of nature. It's in relation to what they feel, what the Malagasies feel and what they do in their everyday life, it's an expression of all this. When you hear the 6/8, you can use it for marching, a military march. (...) the 6/8, it's really that; even if you go running, it's the 6/8. (...) Normally the march is in a metre of 2 or 4, but if you run, if you...for example follow the cattle and all this, the cart, even if you see the cart in the South, when the zebras pull the cart, that's 6/8. It is really a universal metre." (Interview Samy, 7.12.2007)

[42] "(...) even in the way of walking, you can feel the 6/8 a bit. The Antandroy people wouldn't walk in 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2...they are walking people, if one can say so (he laughs) who play metres that are composed while walking. It is related, it is really related to the tempo of life, of everyday life. Even if you do something, there is a song adapted to it, when you transport stones for example, there is someone saying 'Alefa!' (He sings) This is to give rhythm and to join forces at the same time. And this ritual practice builds up slowly in reality. (...) Even in order to lull children to sleep, it's rhythmical in relation to...in relation to the singing (he sings). It is rhythmical, always rhythmical, rhythmical, rhythmical." (Interview Samy, 7.12.2007)



[43] “I don’t know, but then we work, the work on the fields, there is no music, but we sing (he sings), and at the same time we sing in order to shift big stones, to make them reach a certain level, or to push, to work, and to create...during colonisation and before this, there was team work and there, they would sing or shout and they created songs like the slaves or...and created rhythms. And in order to...because there is a Malagasy proverb, you sing and you sing and at the same time during work, you don’t feel that the work is very difficult and very hard, something like this. And thanks to the songs and the rhythm you manage to create a nice atmosphere during work. And that’s where the rhythms were born.” (Interview Ratovo, 26.7.2008)

[44] “Well, it’s, I do think that it is very primitive. What is the base of this metre? The walk. It’s not the military march, eh? It’s the walk. And as there are people who always make their way on foot, they are always walking, they always have this rhythm. (...) Well, you shouldn’t forget, I come back to what I said before...you shouldn’t forget that we use the language in the melody. And the words in the language. There are people, even when they speak, there are regions, I take the example of the Betsileo region, when they speak you’d say they sing. They speak like this (he demonstrates). You’d say they sing. In actual life. So, there isn’t this separate notion of melody! It’s already in everyday life! Even when they talk to each other, you’d say they sing to each other.” (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

[45] “Yes, there were these French people in the 70s, I was young, I played in a night club; when we played the salegy there, they came and they were joking: ‘we will dance the dance of the zebus.’ It’s a bit like the zebus which tramp the rice field. It moves in circles like this, the salegy.” (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

[46] “No, but the rhythm it’s rather in relation to their life condition, to what they do everyday. You know, the people of the High Plateaux, when they pound the rice, when they pound the rice, when they make rice, and you pound rice...it is not one person alone who pounds, it’s three, four (he demonstrates the rhythm). That’s the rhythm. That is where they sometimes gain knowledge of rhythm. Likewise the zebus. One week or two weeks ago, there was a festival in the South (...) in the region of Isalo, in the region of the Bara people. And as the Bara people never separate from their cattle, their dances are what the cattle do. They copy what the cattle do, because...what do they do the whole day? They look after the cattle, they are always in contact with these animals. They look after them, they observe, they try to copy what they do. What they do when they dance, when they dance (he demonstrates the dance) the cattle, they do like this and the dancers do like this. And as the cattle kick out they do like this and that’s the karetsaka. So, from the things that they do everyday, from what they do everyday, they also learn. Beside the environment there is also what they do everyday. That’s their everyday life. The Vezo people are great fishermen. And it’s the hit of the...the fivoy, you call this fivoy (he demonstrates). And when they dance, that is what you hear in their dances.” (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

[47] Ariry: "There was a certain...a certain explanation and interpretation, when you stamp the soil with the feet, it means something. It means something within the rite, within the tradition, within the...within everyday life. For example, if ever you go into the rice fields, the ways...the ways to...how can I put it? In order to dig the soil, there were not yet any spades, things like tractors and all this. But it is with the feet, with wood. So, you use the feet to stamp the soil. So, this everyday movement automatically returns when the people dance in the villages."

Jenny: "And this already also gives..."

Ariry: "The rhythm, of course. And it's automatically, because every day, they do this."  
(Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

[48] "I can't explain how, but what we call Malagasy, because we, we are different from others...yes, from other people. So, maybe it comes from there, because we all have rhythms, we all have rhythms, but the essential rhythm is the 6/8 and we have one language...our official language. We have our official language. It is not the language of the Merina people, but it is an official language and we recognise each other...not like the Africans or ...you see, the Congolese. They have different ethnicities and they speak French in order to get to know each other, but not their language. But we, the Malagasies, even if you come from the South, the North, the West we always recognise each other."  
(Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

[49] "Well, as we have the language on the one hand, the unity of the language, you can equally speak of the unity of the Malagasy music. You shouldn't forget that Malagasy music is always singing. We use the language in it. The language is replicated in the music. There are forms of semi-singing that we call jijy, saova and things like that. These are forms of semi-singing. So, the base is the language." (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

[50] "The Betsileo people call this kipotsaka, when they sing, when they sing, suddenly they stop singing and before dancing they do what is called kipotsaka, they speak like this in a rhythmical way (he demonstrates). They speak, but the rhythm is always there."  
(Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

[51] "It's the synthetic metre that is always in two, and then, the analytical metre that always approaches the language. That's it. And the two overlap. (...) Well...I propose a hypothesis, but it's my own hypothesis. It's about the language. The majority of words, especially for us, the people of the High Plateaux, are three-syllabic words. Tanana, tongotra...these are three-syllabic words. And these are words, once they are integrated into the music, you still have to keep the accentuation, that's why there are no strong and weak beats. It's the accentuation of the words themselves, the accentuation that you...because two words, I give an example of tànana and tanàna. Tànana means hand and the other one town, or village." (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

[52] "Well, first let me tell you, because for me, music is very much related to texts. Because for me, I imagine. Sometimes it is the texts that come to me first and I create the music afterwards. And sometimes, it's the music that comes first and afterwards the texts."

But it's always about, how can I say, finding this collage, for example, I really want the music to suit the texts. And for the texts, it's the same. And also the esprit of the song, the theme of the song." (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

[53] Rakotomavo: "Instrumental music, it is a bit the secret of the Malagasy instrumental music. The majority of instrumental music is songs that are no longer sung. What I..."

Jenny: "That means that the language is always there, even if..."

Rakotomavo: "It is always there. It is always there. And you manage well to play this music if you know...if you have the lyrics in your head. You don't sing them, but you have them in your head. That's better." (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

[54] Hajazz: "Because we think that this exists already for a very long time. How can I put it? The marriage of the tempo and the Malagasy language. That was long ago. That exists already for a long time."

Jenny: "Marriage, that means that the tempo is related to..."

Hajazz: "Related to, related to...the language."

Jenny: "Does it also mean that this also creates the difference between, for example, the High Plateaux and other regions? Because here the dialect is different?"

Hajazz: "No...it's the dialect...well, the meaning is always the same, but the dialect, it's the dialect that is a bit different. But the meaning...how can I put it? The meaning of the words and all this, that's the same...except in the South, the Antandroy people are a bit..."

Jenny: "And there the rhythm is also different?"

Hajazz: "No no, not very much...that is what is always identical, on the rhythmical level." (Interview Hajazz, 12.8.2008)

[55] "Before dancing, you need to have the rhythm. If not, it's not dance, it's choreography. There is a difference between choreography and dance. So, that's the base." (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)

[56] "When I do this thing with Ariry, for example, we don't have any norms, rhythms, but we tap, we tap and when you give the 6/8, all the dancers they are really at ease. They really find themselves in the ...'phew, there we are!' But if you take the 6/8 rhythm away, they dance, but it's not at all the same. And there, I don't know how to explain this, but sometimes, it's like it is heating up, eh? As soon as you turn the thing into a 6/8 rhythm, everyone starts and as soon as you take it out, it's all flat." (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

[57] "It means that if you want to dance a waltz, you can play it with a 6/8, you can dance the waltz with the 6/8. (...) Yes, yes, yes. For the walk, it still works. What kind of other dance? Well, everything that is in 2, 3, or 4. The classical metres." (Interview Samy, 7.12.2007)

[58] "But this dance, when you tap your feet, on the soil, that has been like this all the time, our ancestors danced like this. They tapped the soil with their feet, giving the rhythm (he demonstrates). And well, today we also dance like this. We dance the salegy

like this. In the 60s, you danced the salegy going a bit forward, a bit backward, a bit forward like this. It's a bit like this. Today you can dance freely! Or you can walk like this, you do what you want. In fact, everything you want, yes yes. Oh yes, the salegy, that's the dance of liberty! And listen, that's from me...it is true! You as well, you can say this, because if you regard the people dancing, they do what they want. All alone, or with two, three or more people! But in general, they move in circles in the room, in general. I don't know if you have realised this. For example, if there is a great ball in a big hall, when we do the salegy, in principle, they move in circles in the hall." (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

[59] Ratovo: "Dances as well are related to, yes, because even if you have noticed, now with the generations of 2007 or 2006 or 2005 with the kilalaka, they have created a dance which is a bit weird, they have created somehow a choreography based on a style like that of Tsilivy (he demonstrates). That exists..."

Jenny: "Weird in what way for you?"

Ratovo: "What is weird is...it is like creativity, but it's in a particular way...you didn't dance like this before, but this, this is creativity, a revelation..."

Jenny: "Creativity related to being Malagasy or influenced by..."

Ratovo: "Influenced by the Africans, other influenced by the Africans, others influenced by...by videos and all this...all this, I think that there is a part that is influenced by videos, international clips. Especially the Africans...before, we didn't dance like this." (Interview Ratovo, 26.7.2008)

[60] "It's not that I will encode the traditional dances of my ancestors, but I will try to create a dance that is inspired by traditional dance, it is inspired by traditional dance. So, this is why it is always related to rhythm. I always always always love binaries and ternaries and all this!" (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

[61] "The Malagasies, they come from Africa, from Asia, from Arabia, from India, and even today there are métisses<sup>126</sup> from Europe and the Occident as you say. So, the Malagasies arrived here with this rhythm. I am not a historian, it's only my opinion." (Interview Jaojoby, 21.8.2008)

[62] "In fact, after everything that I have experienced, that I have seen and according to what I know, I am not an ethnomusicologist, but it's really rich, because there is this mixture of different origins, I think. Because the 6/8, you find as well in Africa, in Morocco, in Mali, so it's extremely rich, but we nevertheless have our particularity." (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

[63] Ratovo: "But there is an influence 'planetos', it's there...there is an influence 'planetos', even on the island, they feel like it's another music, even if that's impor...there is other music, because there is a metamorphose, metamorphose, I say, of the musics. The...the...the...what is the music of Africa...Africa...who play

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<sup>126</sup> I decided to leave the French word "métisses" (plural form of "métis") in the English translation as in the French speaking context the notion of "métis" is not as controversial as for example the English expression of "a person of mixed race."

styles....rhythms, rhythms that are very...like the Zulus or...no, the Malagasies, no, but there are styles that are related to Malagasy rhythms. Because there were Zulu people who had been already here in Madagascar, they thought, the children that's here."

Jenny: "That means, you are saying that the rhythm is also especially influenced by African rhythms?"

Ratovo: "Yes, yes. There is a part that is influenced, others are influenced by the Brazilians, by the...there is a metamorphose of rhythm that now arrives in Madagascar in the 20th century. But before, there were rhythms that have not been influenced by...by the other Africans...but still, in 1800, about 1800 I think, there were already European foreigners who had arrived in Madagascar, who already had brought the waltz. So, that what started...especially in the High Plateaux they have used waltz rhythms. But very traditional rhythms, not waltzes." (Interview Ratovo, 26.7.2008)

[64] "I do think that this Malagasy rhythm is sufficiently strong, sufficiently ingrained so that even if there are external influences, it will survive, it will live. It will always vibrate. And these influences, in contrast, will enrich this rhythm. The base, it is there. And if you regard 'Jirama' as Ricky said, 'Jirama' provides for 18% of the electricity of the population of Madagascar. That means that with 18% there are lots places without electricity. So, the population doesn't have to worry about losing the 6/8 because in the villages, in the corners of Madagascar, there is no electricity. So, we play traditional instruments and we play traditional music, so the 6/8 is permanently here. So we don't have to be afraid." (Interview Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

[65] "I think that this is the fact of the travels of the Malagasy ancestors who had left from far, who passed via Africa and who came from Indonesia or Asia and they later passed via Africa, arriving here in Madagascar. Because I think that there is the 6/8. When you listen to this, it is really the spiritual rhythm. But the rhythm is very much influenced by Africa, there we are, the African roots. We also have the Asian roots, Indonesian. And I think it is because of this that the 6/8 was created, because at the same time it is spiritual. But at the same time it is body, rhythmical as well. (...) Because when you listen to African musics, for example, it is true that it makes people dance. It's the body that immediately reacts. It's the body that expresses. But when you listen to Malagasy music a bit, it is true that there is a melody that follows the rhythm. So, we still remember that there is an Asian melody within it, an Asian side. But we also have the rhythm. And at the same time, we also have the rhythm. That is the proof that the Malagasy ancestors travelled, you leave Africa and you arrive here in Madagascar. (...) So, it's the combination of the two, I think, that really creates our rhythm here. It's a bit in the air and spiritual, in the air but sometimes not really set. Because the musicians, when they play the 6/8, the rhythm is in the air." (Interview Justin Vali, 23.11.2007)

[66] "Because personally I still stick to the idea that Madagascar, it's a zone of convergence of civilisation, so it's a buffer zone. And it's because of this that the Malagasies in reality manage very easily to adapt. And the answer to the 6/8, it's exactly this. (...) No, it's because the Malagasies can adapt themselves to create from, in reality to make this synthesis of civilisation, of tempo, of character and all this in order to create, and that's what Tsilav said the other day, it's a melting pot succeeded in reality. And

everyone can identify with it here. The Malagasies have an astonishing ability of a musical ear to adapt to all sorts of music and to all situations. That's it. And the 6/8 is exactly the synthesis of all this." (Interview Samy, 7.12.2007)

[67] Samy: "This, you must...in my opinion, you must look for this in the fusion of Malayan-Polynesians and Africans. Because with the history of the people, what we just said, there are the Africans and afterwards the arrival of the Malayan-Polynesians, there were Arabianised Africans, Islamists. Later...these are the big tendencies, I don't speak about the Indians, the Chinese (he laughs). There is the arrival of the Europeans and so on. This is the rhythmical aspect; this is the spiritual aspect, the spiritual dimension of the music."

Jenny: "What is it, for example?"

Samy: "The spiritual dimension, that's a bit like the Orient. If you study the Oriental culture, it's...there is this spiritual aspect." (Interview Samy, 24.11.2007)

[68] "There...I don't know it's because of what (he laughs). But what I know, you see, we the Malagasies, we...we are a country of colours. You see, you find all colours. Even until now I don't know where the Malagasy root comes from, because we are on an island. Maybe it comes from Africa, maybe it comes from Europe. There are Europeans, there are Asians, there is everything and that becomes a globe that is called Madagascar, you see? (He laughs)" (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

[69] Ratovo: "This is...I don't really have an idea where it comes from, because I think that the Malagasy soul, I say soul...there is a soul that is very different...in ethnicity, I think ethnicity...every ethnicity has its way of expressing the soul. Because there is...even if it is still solidly united, solidly united, because it is an island. So, there is always a melancholy that is based on all this."

Jenny: "Melancholy?"

Ratovo: "Melancholy, the sadness of being an island. We show a lot of solidarity. That is what the Malagasies rely on all the time. Why? Because when we are far away, in England or in Germany or somewhere else, we recognise each other when we meet, even if the music is another in the East, in the East in Tamatave, in the South, eh? We always recognise that it is our music, even if it is the soul of the East or the soul of the High Plateaux." (Interview Ratovo, 26.7.2008)

[70] Ratovo: "And that's it, the Malagasy problem! Even me, I feel really good, not at ease when...there are strong moments of the soul, there are feelings...even if there are rules I don't respect them (he laughs). I ask myself...always when you make recordings; that's a big mistake, it is not a big mistake, but it's the soul that pushes...go there! It is not the metre that is missing, if it is missing sometimes or if it exceeds sometimes, it is not *exactly* on the...!"

Jenny: "Beat?"

Ratovo: "With the tempo (he taps his feet)." (Interview Ratovo, 26.7.2008)

[71] "Of course, sometimes I don't use musical support for my choreographies, but I think that it is the interior rhythm and the souvenir of different rhythms that I have

experienced besides and all this that pushes me to make movements.” (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

[72] “Yes yes, and there, Jenny, I don’t speak about technique with regard to this. 6/8, 3/4, 4/4, 12/8...this, I find that it is a matter of rhythm, each person; each individual has his/her rhythm. And it’s a question of sensibility and it is this sensibility that explains, that really explains the rhythm.” (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

[73] “But I think that it is universal. Like Santana does, when he plays the 6/8, it’s 6/8, it’s universal. But the sensibility, that’s what is different. That’s what is different, the sensibility, because it is...there, we don’t talk about technique, there we really talk about...about breathing, you see?” (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

[74] “Yes, but Jenny, I tell you that ‘this doesn’t sound Malagasy’, that’s wrong! That’s not about sensibility, because the rhythm, as soon as you have it, you can do everything you want, even with a Brazilian, even with...I don’t know! It’s really a question of complicity, sensibility and that’s rhythm. And this is what defines rhythm. When I...even me, when I play with him, we do like this and we understand each other and then, you, you watch, but you don’t understand, but what does that mean? Why do they look at each other with regard to this rhythm? But we, we look at each other like this...look, you see? We look at each other and sometimes we always do like this (he demonstrates) and we look at each other and we understand each other. We understand each other, but we can’t explain it to each other (he laughs)...what is it, this look? We understand each other, but we can’t explain it to each other and there, for you it is really important to explain in your research that this rhythm there...it’s spiritual! That’s how I see it. It’s spiritual. And maybe it’s because of this that Santana, maybe he really wanted to come in order to feel these things, because we can’t explain it. (...) That’s it! And the rhythm, that’s really the communication within human sensibility. Definition (he laughs)! That’s my definition. (Everyone laughs) If we manage to communicate...once I played...because we talk all the time, but we don’t play. But one day I said to Jean-Claude, let’s play! Like this, eh? And there, we stayed, we stayed, because you see, that’s how it is.” (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

[75] “Or otherwise, it’s the cardiac rhythm affected by emotion; there we go with the 6/8. (Everyone laughs).” (Interview Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

### **Chapter 3.3**

[76] Rajery: “Well, how to create the rhythm? Because there is the theme. It’s to tell the youth: Caution! You need to think well before doing something. So, in order to attract the youth’s attention so that the message gets across, which rhythm? Which character? So that’s hard work. Here, I have chosen the tsapiky, but if you listen to it, first you will feel ‘Ah, that’s reggae!’ You see? But actually if we drift away from the tsapiky and if we reduce the tempo a little bit, it’s reggae. Yes, it’s incredible! But we didn’t realise when we worked on that music, we just did it like that and later... (...) In fact, because here, you see...the young people they adore festive things, you see? Things that make you

dance, most of them do...you see? The young people, they need that. And here, we have worked the tsapiky. In the first part of the song, we have said, well, the people will think that it is reggae. But already, the way of playing the guitar is not reggae. Sometimes you also feel 'Ah, that's South African!' You see? It's a journey. But the base of the song is tsapiky. (He demonstrates) That's tsapiky. But there is also this thing that says that we can't play the tsapiky like the people from the South. So, we, we play the tsapiky in our own way."

Jenny: "And what is the difference if you compare it to the tsapiky in the South?"

Rajery: "In fact, the difference, it's for example the melody of the guitar."

Jenny: "But the rhythm is the same?"

Rajery: "The rhythm is the same."

Jenny: "The difference is maybe in the melody..."

Rajery: "In the melody. Because you know, the singers of tsapiky, it's not like I do it. It's not the same. But we tried to keep the rhythmical root. That this rhythm is, it's tsapiky. (...) Well, it's also our way of showing the tsapiky, of playing the tsapiky. So, that's us, based on our small analysis, our small research. Because we can't do it in the same way that they do it. Because we as well, we would like to create something, search for something new. But it always stays in the esprit of the tsapiky." (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

[77] "There is the guitar, the sax, but the riff, it's rhythmical. It's a melody that returns and that becomes rhythmical. (...) The Rolling Stones, when you do (he demonstrates), that, that's rhythmical. So, when you play music in a 6/8 and you add a melody that is a riff, the rhythm becomes richer. Actually I don't know (he laughs). (...) A melody can be rhythmical and what will also enrich music in a 6/8 is the melody and the riff you will add, generally it's in the esprit of the 6/8. So, the 6/8 becomes heavier and even richer." (Interview Jean-Claude, 18.7.2008)

[78] "That's exactly what I will demonstrate to you now. (...) 1, 2, 3, 4 when a European listens to that, he says 1, 2, 3, 4 whereas we, in our head, it's 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6..." (Interview Samy, 7.12.2007)

[79] "Dou know this song? 'L'étoile des neiges'? (He sings) It is a waltz, but here (he sings and claps in two). We play it in two, that's typical Malagasy." (Interview Rakotomavo 1.8.2008)

[80] "But also the influence, the openness, the influence, that will explain many things. For example, when we play some stuff with Doné, something which is really in 4/4 like funk or I don't know, but he immediately plays a 6/8 on the 4/4! You see? And that's good, because it really has given us a difference, but this difference, it will create harmony if it's well handled." (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

[81] "Because the strong beats of the other side of the Ocean, that's something else. And the strong beats here, even among Africans, we the Malagasies, the strong beats that's 'tap,' with the 6/8, you see? (He demonstrates) It's up like this. Because the verb, you'd



say: 'andrandraïna'. So the future is there, so the strong beat is 'tap tap tap'." (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

[82] "Because with Dama, Dama's strong beats, when he plays, it's really different to us! And that's him. It's him and here you can't say: 'Dama, that's wrong, no!' But really, it's like that. It's a question of sensibility with regard to the environment, education, one's inner music." (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

[83] "The difference, that's the beat. The beat of the 6/8, because we the Malagasies, we do not follow the beat correctly, exactly on the beat, exactly in the metre. We play contretemps, or 'half-beat' or 'before the beat' or with the beat, that's the way we play the 6/8. And that's the difference between the European and the Malagasy 6/8, because we don't sing directly on the beat. The rhythm, it doesn't fall exactly on the beat, tac tac tac...but we can sing in 'half-beat,' a bit before or a bit after. Or we play contretemps. You see, that's the difference." (Interview Bilo, 19.8.2008)

[84] "When it's not 'square,' when it is round, often you enter on the contretemps, you never enter on the first beat. That's the problem of the Europeans. But once you get used to it; like you who has been interested in salegy for two or three years, you can play it!" (Interview Jaobjoby, 21.8.2008)

[85] "I have seen a percussionist who plays with Régis in La Réunion at the "Kabardock," they, they had problems. And I was in the audience and I knew what the problem was (he laughs). Because Régis, he plays things like (he demonstrates), and then the guy he starts playing in a 3/4 (he demonstrates) and that's like a waltz or I don't know. But I have understood the situation. So, it's not a question of being Malagasy, or French, or Comorian or..., but it's really...you get it or you don't." (Interview Ricky, 18.7.2008)

[86] "That's very easy, especially the 6/8. (...) But it's the soul that is missing!" (Interview Ratovo, 26.7.2008)

[87] Ariry: "(...) a French. And he was here for nine years. But even nine years of practice of what we did, there was always...what I would call a contretemps of the strong beats that I would follow. And sometimes, I have given classes in Europe and in the Unites States and there was always this problem."

Jenny: "But can you explain what they do? If you explain the difference..."

Ariry: "The difference, the difference is always the attack..."

Jenny: "The attack?"

Ariry: "The rhythm attack. The first beat of the rhythm...oh I don't really manage to explain, but I don't know why, I don't know how, but there is always the attack of the first beat (he claps) of what I think is the first beat and that I would like to follow. But the other persons, they have another...their own first beat." (Interview Ariry, 26.7.2008)

[88] Hajazz: "Yes if...if...for example between Africans, it works quicker, with the Europeans it's a bit difficult for them. But, for example, if you know how to read sheet

music like this, you can decipher some notes. But from time to time the problem is, you cannot, finally everyone has his own way of playing. (...) The problem is the accentuation, the accents, there are accents, there are strong beats and weak beats. That's for example why foreign people do not manage to play like the Malagasies. Because there is the accent (he taps his foot)..."

Jenny: "What is it..."

Hajazz: "The placement of the strong and weak beats and crotchets rests and all this...what can I say? There are the pedals, the...what can I say? Nuances like that."

(Interview Hajazz, 12.8.2008)

[89] "The problem with Malagasy music and the vazaha is the existence of binaries and ternaries at the same time in one song, it's...you see (he laughs). (...) Sometimes when we meet foreign musicians, they have difficulties. Because we, we are capable of adding ternary rhythms to binaries and vice versa." (Interview Rajery, 17.12.2007)

[90] "Because the musicians, when they play the 6/8, the rhythm is in the air. So, that's why often foreign musicians, they have difficulties in following the rhythm. And when we play the salegy, every time we give concerts abroad, foreigners, it's difficult for them to follow the salegy rhythm." (Interview Justin, 23.11.2007)

[91] "It's a difficult project, because bringing together people who have never left their area, with very personal instruments that they have built themselves, well...When I build an instrument, it's for me. It's me who will be playing it, it's not the others. And as I just told you, between two valiha, it doesn't work. He must play his instrument. And this instrument was not designed to be in an orchestra. It is for playing alone. So, that's the problem for this kind of project." (Interview Rakotomavo, 1.8.2008)



## **Appendix II**

### **List of all interviews conducted**

Interview with Ariry, Ariry Andriamoratsiresy, Antananarivo, 26.7.2008.

Interview with Bebey, Mathurin Rakotomanga, Antananarivo, 14.5.2007.

Interview with Billy, Billy Raharisoa, Antananarivo, 14.4.2005.

Interview with Bilo, Dana Ramahaleo Bilo, Antananarivo, 19.8.2008.

Interview with Dadagaby, Gabriel Rakotomavo, Antananarivo, 6.12.2007.

Interview with Doné Andriambaliha, Dieudonné Randrianantoanina, Antananarivo, 18.4.2005.

Interview with Doné Sahondrafinina (translated by Mathurin Rakotomanga and Olivia Sahondrafinina), Antananarivo, 15.7.2008.

Interview with Donné, Donné Randriamanantena I, Antananarivo, 7.3.2005.

Interview with Donné, Donné Randriamanantena II, Antananarivo, 15.7.2008.

Interview with Hajazz, Haja Mbolatiana Tovo Rasolomahatratra, Antananarivo, 12.8.2008.

Interview with Hery, Hery Randrianary, Antananarivo, 26.11.2007.

Interview with Jaojoby, Eusèbe Jaojoby, Antananarivo, 21.8.2008.

Interview with Jean-Claude, Jean-Claude Vinson, Antananarivo, 18.7.2008.

Interview with Justin Vali, Justin Rakotondrasoa, Antananarivo, 23.11.2007.

Interview with Kassim, Julien Kassim Rajaonarison, Antananarivo, 28.4.2005.

Interview with Linda, Linda Volahasiniaina, Antananarivo, 7.3.2005.

Interview with Mami Basta, Ranaivo Maminirina Ramiandraharisoa, Antsirabe, 17.3.2005.

Interview with Medicis, Jean Maryse Rabesiraka, Antananarivo, 19.8.2008.

Interview with Mendrika, Mendrika Rasolomahatratra, Antananarivo, 18.7.2008.

Interview with Modeste, Modeste Hugues Randramahitasoa, London, 7.2.2006.

Interview with Monja, Bege Monjamahafay (Monja), Antananarivo, 26.4.2005.

Interview with Njaka, Njaka L. Rakotondramanana, Antananarivo, 26.11.2007.

Interview with Paddy, Patrick Bush, London (SOAS), 2.3.2006.

Interview with Papay, Papay Raveloaris, Antananarivo, 21.7.2008.

Interview with Pix (Lova), Antananarivo, 27.4.2005.

Interview with Rageorges, Georges Radimy (translated by Sammy), Antananarivo, 13.4.2005.

Interview with Rajery, Germain Randrianarisoa I, Antananarivo, 11.4.2005.

Interview with Rajery, Germain Randrianarisoa II, Antananarivo, 17.12.2007.

Interview with Rakotomavo, Germain Rakotomavo, Antananarivo, 1.8.2008.

Interview with Groupe Hira Gasy Rakotosolofo, Feonarivo, 13.12.2007.

Interview with Ratovo, Ratovonirina Ranaivovololona, Antananarivo, 26.7.2008.

Interview with Ricky, Ricky Randimbiarison (Olombelo Ricky) I, Antananarivo, 7.3.2005.

Interview with Ricky, Ricky Randimbiarison (Olombelo Ricky) II, Antananarivo, 13.4.2005.

Interview with Ricky, Ricky Randimbiarison (Olombelo Ricky) III, Antananarivo, 18.7.2008.

Interview with Sammy, Samoela Andriamalalaharijaona I, Antananarivo, 13.4.2005.

Interview with Sammy, Samoela Andriamalalaharijaona II, 23.11.2007.

Interview with Samy, Samuelson Rabenirainy I, Antananarivo, 24.11.2007.

Interview with Samy, Samuelson Rabenirainy II, Antananarivo 7.12.2007.

Interview with Seta, Seta Ramaroson I, Antananarivo, 4.12.2007.

Interview with Vaovy, Jean Gabin Fanovona I, Antananarivo, 19.4.2005.

Interview with Vaovy, Jean Gabin Fanovona II, Antananarivo, 10.12.2007.

Interview with Vaovy, Jean Gabin Fanovona III, Antananarivo, 17.12.2007.



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