Narratives for Nature

Storytelling as a vehicle for improving the intercultural dialogue on environmental conservation in Cameroon.

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To my parents, and to my grandfather

We tell ourselves stories in order to live. We interpret what we see, select the most workable of multiple choices. We live entirely by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the 'ideas' with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria, which is our actual experience.

Joan Didion, The White Album

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The present research has its roots in the fieldwork carried out as a student for the Centre of Environmental Studies in Leiden in 1993/1994. During that fieldwork I spent six months in the Far North of Cameroon to talk with local people about their perception of the human–elephant conflict. During this stay I collected my first stories that from the beginning left a deep impression on me. A year later, after I finished my studies, I used these stories as an anecdote to illustrate my research during a lecture which was attended by prof. Wouter de Groot. He was the first one to inspire me to elaborate further on this theme, which finally resulted in a number of fieldwork visits to Cameroon, first as a staff member of WWF and later as a NWO/WOTRO fellow. My appreciation goes to all the people that inspired me and helped me to finally work out the ideas in a concrete proposal of which the present dissertation is the final outcome.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Instinct in a Cameroonian movie house

Unsought experiences may sometimes lead to the most valuable insights concerning one's work. Consider the following anecdote that illustrates the essence of what this book is about.

After some weeks of fieldwork in two villages in Central Province in Cameroon, I spent my first free afternoon in the capital city of Yaounde. To break the day I decided to see a movie. In Yaounde my choice was limited to one cinema and one movie of which I did not even read the title. I just sneaked into the dark and hazy cinema hall and a moment later my eyes described the title '*Instinct*' with Anthony Hopkins in the leading role; not the worst of luck.

The film script is simple. Anthony Hopkins plays the role of a criminal who has been imprisoned for years in a maximum security jail in America. He behaves like an animal, and is not willing to talk anymore. Furthermore, in the script there is his emotional daughter who wants to get in touch with her father. She seeks help from a young ambitious psychologist. After some long and dangerous sessions the psychologist finally succeeds in talking with the criminal who then tells his story. The rest of the movie flashes back and tells the life story of the criminal who appears to have once been an ambitious biological researcher, going into the rainforest to study gorillas. The movie shows how he got in touch with a group of gorillas for the first time, and how he finally became accepted in the group as being one of them. There in the deep jungle he rediscovered his deep sense of love and harmony, and he decided never to return to the human world. So far, so good. Until one day a group of military poachers entered the jungle to kill gorillas in a terribly bloody way. At the supreme moment the biologist had to choose between life and death and finally he killed one of the military men in order to save his beloved gorilla male. He was arrested and put in jail where he decided to spend the rest of his life in silence.

It is a typical American movie, full of emotional images, impressive life lessons and romantic music. Being European myself I could very easily imagine the impact the movie would have on millions of western businessmen and women spending a rare free evening in a cinema to relax; people who have probably never experienced the jungle and never seen free-living primates. In fact, it could have been a perfect promotion movie for nature conservation.

But here the situation was different. This was Cameroon and I was surrounded by Cameroonian watchers who, fortunately for me, have the habit to interfere with a movie by making numerous comments. After a while the hall was filled with comments such as:

"This is incredible, white men are crazy!" "What a strange way to see the jungle!" "What crazy movies white men make!" "What are you doing, trying to touch a gorilla?!"

At the climax when (accompanied by dramatic music) Anthony Hopkins kills the poacher, at least five people left the cinema prematurely, very angry and shocked. How could one ever kill a human being to protect an animal? In this case, an animal that is even dangerous?

I did not leave the cinema before the end of the movie. When I came out of the dark cinema room I watched the sunset above the beautiful, filmy landscape that suddenly had become reality. My thoughts usually jump between reality and fiction immediately after watching a movie. But now they also wandered around in the confusion caused by a strange juxtaposition between my conditioned European worldview and the Cameroonian view expressed so vividly by the people around me. Suddenly, the message of the movie had become unclear to me. Somewhere, somehow, something went wrong in the process of simply transmitting information from, in this case, the filmmaker to the audience.

1.2 General background and research questions

1.2.1 Stories and storytelling

"The river meanders because it goes alone." (Cameroonian proverb)

In the last decades many countries, mainly in the western world have continuously shown their increasing disquietude about the future of biodiversity and other natural resources in the world. Since many of these natural resources are located in developing countries, these countries have been confronted by a large variety of conservation activities. Many of these activities, however, have aroused suspicion, opposition or a general lack of co-operation, since these countries do not only consist of natural resources but are, of course, also inhabited by a large variety of indigenous and allochtonous people having their more or less traditional way of living. This means that values are not always shared, as we have seen from the example of the cinema. Moreover, in negotiations there is often a lack of concrete benefits for the local people[1]. Conflicts between nature protection organisations and the local people in developing countries have regularly led even more to disastrous consequences for nature protection. The traditional top-down approach to natural resource management and conservation has been seriously criticised (IIED, 1994; Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997).

This dissertation focuses on the issue of different values and the exchange of these values. Learning from our mistakes it has become clear in recent years that for a successful and sustainable policy, the participation of the local people is very necessary. This has resulted in a spate of new developments that vary from simple interviews and discussions

[1] It should be noted that, although not part of this study, also on a national level benefits are not equally shared.

with local people to concrete activities grouped under terms such as co-management[2] (Berkes, 1994; Borrini-Feyerabend, 1996).

In spite of all these attempts it should be noted, however, that until now participation of the local people is often limited by the fact that the communication practised does not escape being dominated by Western ideas and styles of operation. Local people are often confronted with abstract concepts that are alien to them and they are asked to participate in projects implicitly designed on the basis of these concepts. The cultural 'gap' is left unbridged. This usually leads to silent opposition and 'bought collaboration' rather than to dialogue or fruitful co-operation. The question remains how to come to a more efficient and balanced way of communication.

As we have seen from the example in the cinema, 'stories' communicate a lot, even though the process of communication is not always harmonious and unambiguous. Let me share another experience.

In 1993/1994 I carried out a study in the north of Cameroon, focusing on a specific case of confrontation between local and supra-local ideas on nature conservation (Zwaal 1995, A and B). The presence of endangered wildlife in the area, among which one of the last big elephant populations of West-Africa, had gained the attention of nature conservationists. This had led to the establishment of the Waza National Park in the Far North Province of Cameroon in 1968. The Park provided a refuge for the elephants but at the same time it also caused the eviction of many local people living in the park area. Moreover, since the creation of the park there have been continuous conflicts between farmers and elephants because most of the elephants seasonally migrate out of the park and destroy the millet fields in neighbouring villages (Tchamba, 1996).

While staying in the villages around the park and talking with people about their perception of the problem, I became acquainted with a still very lively storytelling tradition. People could easily be invited to tell stories and a wealth of visions appeared to be contained in these stories. Moreover, local people found it quite acceptable if stories were used the other way around too, as a way to convey ideas or information from researcher to farmer. Telling stories in the villages appeared to be a very natural and entertaining way to discuss the sometimes difficult issues. Many authors have reported similar experiences. Storytelling is conductive to an atmosphere of trust (Neuhauser, 1993) and it can be used to express and discuss tensions and problems in conflicting situations that cannot be changed directly (Hansen and Kahnweiler, 1993).

Cultures all over the world are characterised by the fact that people tell stories, myths and legends (Campbell, 1988; Swagerman, 1991; Bal, 1997) that express the way they

[2] In literature many different terms are used instead of co-management such as local resource management, community based management, gestion de terroir villageois, grass-roots management, self governance of common pool resources, joint management (see e.g. Van Est, 1999, p. 14).

perceive the world and deal with it. It may therefore be hypothesised that stories provide an access to the world of non-scientific knowledge and visions.[3] These visions may be studied as an alternative next to the supra-local theories. The experiences during my fieldwork in 1993 have resulted in the hypothesis that storytelling, probably the oldest form of transmitting culture, can be a fascinating vehicle for two-way teaching and learning. It works on two levels. In the first place, local stories may help to improve mutual understanding of the issues one wants to communicate about. In the second place, stories may help to counterbalance the historical difference in power between supra-local and local in the communication process. By using 'the local' style of communication one may help to uplift the social status and self-awareness of the local people. However, ethical risks do exist as well; these will be discussed in section 1.3.

The use of stories for teaching and learning is not new. Storytelling has been used as a practical tool in a variety of settings such as project management, teaching in medicine, primary education, nursing, family therapy and the strengthening of organisations (Zemke, 1990; Hensel and Rasco, 1992; Becvar and Becvar, 1993; Belpassi, 1994; Amtoft, 1994).

The scientific status of storytelling has been enhanced by post-modern philosophy. Writing from South Africa, Degenaar (1996) states:

"Post-modernity accepts the reality of a diversity of cultures, views them as different ways of structuring human experience and struggles with the problem of fostering dialogue between a diversity of lifestyles and thought-styles."

Not surprisingly, one of the most important changes in the transition from modernism to post-modernism is the change of the type of discourse. Alvarez & Merchán (1992, p. 43) say about this:

"Whereas modernism sought universal, cosmopolitan discourse, post-modernism begins with the recognition of the impossibility of such a discourse and proposes instead a more modest project: to forget about the search for the 'grand narrative' and to learn from local narratives such as autobiographies, novels and tales."

In fact, this is exactly what this research tries to do. What is indicated as 'the universal cosmopolitan discourse' on nature conservation in many conferences in the world has in practice mostly been the specific discourse of a dominating group of people. This dissertation tries to open the debate by learning from 'local narratives'.

Telling stories of a problem situation is a contextual key tool for what De Groot (1992, p. 210) calls 'contextual ethics'. Instead of balancing the conflicting rights and obligations by means of some abstract calculus of fairness, contextual ethics is to feed this abstract principles down into the problem, guiding the representation of the problem in relevant

[3] In literature many terms are given for this knowledge such as emic or folk, or Plebeian science (Richards, 1996).

directions by enriching the description with more detail and context until the representation is compelling and solutions are found.

However, as Degenaar continues, extreme post-modernism *"only perpetuates conflict since it does not invite dialogue"*. Also De Groot (1992, p.211) states that environmental science does not need to follow post-modernism in all its extremes. Indeed, extreme thinking in differences may lead to an impasse in the ongoing world debate on environmental conservation. This is why, to avoid this impasse, a certain degree of categorisation, especially local and supra-local, is made in this research to be able to define some general viewpoints for the dialogue. As we shall see, this research will use a moderate style of postmodernism in which a practice of conflict, *i.e.* a polarisation between local and supra-local ideas, invites reason to involve itself in a concerned negotiation of cross-cultural meaning (cf. Schrag 1992). In the next section I will elaborate more on the differentiation between local and supra-local.

1.2.2 Dealing with the differentiation: local and supra-local

Stories, obviously, are shared phenomena. Also the cinema experience in section 1.1 shows that people share responses and values. At the same time, the world is endlessly differentiated. In terms of the present study, there are obviously western and non-western world visions, urban and rural values, male and female story versions, Islamic and Christian values, mythological stories and little 'fun-stories' and so on. Within the western world, visions of nature are highly variable between 'expert' and 'common people', between young and old etc. Within Cameroon, differences will exist between people who live in big cities and undergo a daily influence of modern life standards, education communication facilities and influence from government and development organisations, and people who are illiterate and have spent their whole life in the same rural area. Within the capital city of Yaounde, differences will certainly exist between the moviegoers, government visions, urban elite and slum dwellers. Within rural villages, differences will exist between newcomers and older families-in-power, between men and women. And on top of that, each and every individual will have his or her own story to tell and vision to share. How does one deal with this differentiation?

As said in the former section, postmodernism, sick of the colonisation of the world by the western story (characterised as masculine, dualistic, economic, universal, scientific and structured such that there is, in fact, only this one story worthy to tell) has tended strongly to emphasise differentiation. Yet, stories are obviously and intrinsically made for sharing and some relevant middle ground for differentiation has to be found here.

First of all we have to be aware of what should be the key dimensions of differentiation. For a study in a gender framework, the gender dimension obviously is key, and terms such as male, female, feminine and sex have to be problematized and defined in detail. For a neo-Marxist study interested in how stories may be used by the powerful as a cultural back-up of

economic oppression, the same holds for terms such as power, wealth and oppression. For the present study, it may already be clear, intuitively, that I am particularly interested in cross-cultural communication between what may roughly be called the western, developed world and the developing, third world. Embedded in the historical context of their relationship, developing countries accuse western countries of the ecological debts they have because of the high rates of nature destruction that have resulted from industrial evolution. This has led among other things to treaties in which part of the economic debts of these countries is remitted in exchange for the protection of nature.

Using this as the key dimension, this implies that other dimensions will not be problematized. Thus, in this dissertation I will sporadically but freely talk about differentiation between northern and southern Cameroon, between different ethnic groups in each region, and between men and women without taking these terms on other than their *prima facie* meaning.

It must be noted, however, that the simple connotation of 'western versus developing countries' does not cover the problem. At the same time, it may lead to false distinctions and hence needs more differentiation. Van den Born *et al.* (2001), for example, show that the visions on nature expressed by common people in western countries are in reality considerably more shaded and positive than politicians and philosophers often assume them to be. Thus, the conclusions and worries regarding the consequences of human behaviour for the environment may not be a representation of a homogenous group of 'westerners'.

The point of departure for this research are the stories at the local level. With local I simply refer to the rural village. 'Local' as used in this dissertation refers in the first place to people actually living in the villages in the research area in Cameroon. These people can be originally from that area or later immigrants. So no *a priori* distinction is made between indigenous groups and outsiders, although I am aware that in specific cases stories cannot be understood without including this information. Then, 'western' becomes defined as the characteristic vision on nature and natural resources brought to the village by spokespeople representing the dominant global level institutions. This characteristic vision could be called 'western' because dominant ideas related to nature or environmental protection are formulated primarily at the global level system and it is these countries and cultures that dominate the global scene.[4] Dominant ideas include western theories of nature as originated from the world of professional science, philosophy and ethics (Van den Born *et al.* 2001). However, since more countries and cultures are entering this stage, 'western' may become a misnomen. I therefore opt for the more abstract term 'supra-local' as opposed to 'local'.

The term 'supra-local' also carries the advantage that it makes explicit that differences in vision are not only a matter of cultural values. It is especially regarding the scale. 'Local' refers here to villages in Cameroon, but in fact it may also apply to rural people from other

[4] It should be noted that the distinction between local and global should be seen in a dynamic context which implies that the process of globalisation plays an important role. I will come back to this later in my dissertation.

developing countries as well as to rural people from developed countries. The supra-local system level is characterised by a large scale and long term frame. It is, for example, only on this scale that it is visible that species are rare or endemic, and that we can talk about supra-local economic values of nature and supra-local opportunities such as eco-tourism. Hence the term supra-local is a mixture of predominantly western values and visions of nature, and the objective factors visible on that supra-local scale.

The distinction local/supra-local should probably also be divided further. Several suggestions for this have been given in literature. With regard to visions of nature, for example, Van den Born *et al.* (2001) make a division in three layers. The highest level of abstraction is the theory of nature, the world of philosophy and ethics. The second layer is the social construction of nature formed by the public policy discourse and arts. The final layer is that of the general public, or the lay men.

It should be noted again that in spite of further differentiation it is always difficult and tricky to make generalisations about people's ideas and opinions. This may finally lead to the conclusion that, to avoid risks, no stereotype groups can be defined at all[5]. Although formally true this will not help us any further in the attempt to improve communication. The present research focuses on general trends in the communication process in developing countries, in particular through the study of stories in Cameroon, and I shall thus limit my generalisation by using two terms: local and supra-local. The risks of using any categorisation may be limited by the fact that any classification used in this dissertation refers in the first place to the stories that exist. It does not regard people individually. As will be discussed later, one individual may be inspired by different (local as well as supra-local) stories at the same time. Moreover, the dimensions relate especially to the intended story message, not to the language or imageries or format used. As we shall see in chapter 9, stories with local format and locally used characters could be still called a supra-local story.

Taking into consideration the limitations of this categorisation the first premise of this research is that attempts to protect the environment with the help of local people fail (partly) because of fundamental miscommunication. There still appears to be a need for a truly inter-cultural dialogue taking into consideration the differences and relationships between local and supra-local people.

1.2.3 The research questions

So far, I have presented the basic assumptions of this research. The first assumption is that intercultural miscommunication is an important factor for the failure of environmental projects. The second assumption is that stories may be an interesting tool for improving the local/ supra-local communication. Based on fieldwork in Cameroon, this research tries to

[5] This conclusion was often used as a criticism on the research proposal during various plenary discussions.

explore the possibilities of using stories for intercultural communication on environmental or nature conservation[6]. This can be formulated in the following research question:

***How may stories and the method of storytelling in Cameroon become a vehicle, in terms of substance and in terms of methodology, for improving the intercultural (local/ supra-local) dialogue on environmental conservation*?**

In order to address this question a number of sub-questions have been formulated. The central term in the research question is 'dialogue'. With dialogue I mean a form of communication that provides mutual learning and teaching for both local and supra-local people. Dialogue implicitly embraces two directions and therefore two actions, in this case (from the viewpoint of the supra-local researcher): a) listening to local stories and b) telling (existing or composed) stories to locals. With respect to the first action the following sub-questions were formulated. In short, question 1 deals with the setting of storytelling, questions 2 and 3 with the format, and questions 4 and 5 with the content of the stories.

1) *How are stories told? Where and when? Who tells and who listens?*
2) *What kind of stories do people tell and how are these stories named and categorised by the local people?*
3) *What are the specific characteristics of the different story forms?*
4) *What are the stories about in terms of subject and themes, and how do they relate, directly or indirectly, to the environment?*
5) *How do local stories relate to the prevailing ideas of supra-local environmentalism?*

Related to the second action derived from the main research question, the following sub questions were formulated:

6) What stories content and format are most preferred by local people?
7) What influence do different stories have on the dialogue; for example, with respect to entertainment, transfer of knowledge, and intensity and openness of ensuing discussion?
8) How may the knowledge obtained from the former questions be applied for the creation of new stories as a communication tool?

6 The term environmental conservation could in this study also be replaced by nature conservation since it concerns mainly forest and animals. However, to avoid narrow thinking and an *a priori* categorisation of concepts that might be typical western concepts, the concept environmental conservation is preferred. In the next chapter more attention will be paid to the definition of these concepts.

Before further exploring the research questions, some remarks should be made about the consequences of asking such questions, especially concerning the issue of ethics. This will be discussed in the next section.

1.3 General remarks about the research: relevance and ethical considerations

The research questions may serve both a scientific and a practical goal. The scientific relevance is in the first place to add to existing knowledge on the Sahelian and wider universe of stories, and to analyse and categorise stories using story-analytical theories (Propp, 1968; Griffin, 1993; Bauman, 1986; Paulme, 1976). Secondly, analyses are done concerning themes and structures, especially concerning conceptualisations of nature and its relationship to humans. This directly links up with debates on concepts and relations (in short: on African eco-cosmologies) found by, for example, Zanen (1996), Van Beek & Banga (1992), and Schlee (1992). I will come back to this in the course of the dissertation, especially in chapter 5 and 6.

In order to talk about a real dialogue, as defined in section 1.2.3, local stories should be counterbalanced with existing supra-local stories. This means that in this approach a moderate style of postmodernism has been chosen in the sense that supra-local knowledge and insights with respect to the environment are considered to be stories as well. Here I join with many authors who have written about 'western narratives' (Roe, 1991; Leach and Mearns, 1996). I will come back to the definition of stories in section 2.3.

Hence stories include a wide range of common beliefs, scientific publications and accepted moral standards, including for example the ingredients of the movie described in section 1.1. Theoretically, there is not made an *a priori* distinction between fact and fiction. In the final design of the dissertation the symmetry between both parties in the communication process is maintained by discussing and comparing both local and supra-local stories. In this way this dissertation aims to contribute to a better insight in the process of communication by confronting both locals as well as supra-locals with different visions and the implicit assumptions behind these visions.

However, the ultimate aim of the research is to develop a methodology for the design of stories and storytelling formats for inter-cultural dialogue. It is part of a wider debate concerning intercultural dialogue in pre-modern, modern and post-modern ways of understanding the world. Obviously, the practical relevance of the research is related to the final use of these insights on methodology for communication practices.

The experimental aspect of the research particularly has led to the flare up of a debate about the moral consequences of this research. It is, after all, not obvious that the mere fact of using local stories may reduce the unequal position of locals in the intercultural discourse on environmental protection. On the contrary, stories can be a very cunning way for supra-locals to 'sugar-coat the pill'. In other words, if stories appear to be an adequate tool of

communication they can be misused by supra-locals to indoctrinate locals with supra-local ideas in a very efficient way.

Apart from the fact that I belief that this criticism[7] highly overestimates the impact of this research[8], a very pragmatic answer to this criticism could be to skip the practical relevance of the research by stating that the scientific researcher has a neutral position that does not regard possible misuses of his/her scientific results. Except for the fact that it is a rather easy-going argument, it may also be wrong in the logic of the underlying assumptions of the research. Especially in more post-modern insights it is recognised that the position of the researcher is not as neutral as it seems. In fact, there is a continuous influence between researcher and researched, between object and subject, and hence, in this case, between local and supra local, precisely because of the ongoing discourse between people. The influence of people on people is the driving force for culture (Milton, 1996). This notion has of course its output on every study of cultures. As Sanjek (1990) states correctly:

"*Anthropological research has too long tried to conform itself to the standards of natural sciences to be objective and neutral, whereas the power of anthropology is to be aware of your subjectivity and all its consequences*."

These consequences may still be perceived to be only theoretical but the problem of neutrality in the context of this research does not limit itself to the scientific level. Take for example a case from the research area. During a field visit of workers from the Waza Logone project, a local Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in the Far North of Cameroon, the team was presented as an impartial intermediary between locals and supra-locals (Scholte, 1999). However, a justified question would be whether one is impartial when already co-operating with officials and being responsible for the realisation of already made decisions (Scholte, pers. comm.). The same counts for this dissertation. Although I aim to be balanced in my analyses of local as well as supra-local stories, the simple example in section 1.1 already shows that I can never escape from being trained in supra-local ideas.

Thus, it seems necessary to further discuss the moral consequences of the research and how to avoid or reduce the possible negative impact. Indeed, one cannot escape from this ethical discussion when dealing with intercultural discussions on such large-scale problems as those on the environment. Environmental ethics (Cheney & Weston, 1999) has become an important issue. Discussing these environmental ethics Cheney & Weston argues for the change of epistemology-based ethics into ethics-based-epistemology. The former considers the world to be a given fact that can be known and this knowledge provides ethics. The latter considers the world to consist of partly unknown possibilities. According to Cheney & Weston, ethics should be pluralistic, dissonant and discontinuous. Ethics come first and are

[7] This criticism was extensively discussed during the CERES workshops in Hilversum, April 1999 and during several sessions in the CNWS-school.

[8] Personally, I do not believe that this research in itself could determine whether or not other parties use or misuse stories that have been made available.

meant to improve knowledge and to enrich life. Ethics-based-epistemology recognises the different structures that give significance to human beings and their environment.

Storytelling, since time immemorial, has been used for the transfer of values. With that, storytelling is an ethically charged activity. This is not to say, of course, that all storytelling is ethically wrong. It is hard to find a problem, for instance, in a mother transferring values of care to her child through the telling of stories, or with Jesus expounding key values of God's Kingdom through his parables. On the other extreme, it is hard to find anything good in powerful groups using stories in the mass media for the covert brainwashing of the public. Thus, it is highly relevant to define the ethically relevant characteristics of the storytelling situations the present study potentially deals with and to master the possible ethical rules inherent in these situations.

For this research there are two ethically relevant parameters.

1) Who tells the story? In our case, the relevant distinction is between the local people and the outsider, in this case the researcher. The reason of relevance is twofold: a) the reflectivity of the outsider versus the relative innocence of the local people on the subject of nature conservation and b) the potentially more powerful position of the outsider who may be connected, for example, to an environmental NGO.
2) Is the story intentionally designed for discussion of environmental conservation issues or, alternatively, is it a story that contains nature elements but is designed for other purposes?

Combining 1 and 2 leads to four basic situations, all of which carry their own ethical aspects.

A) Local people telling stories designed for discussing issues related nature conservation
B) Local people telling non-conservation stories
C) Outsiders telling stories designed for discussing issues related to nature conservation
D) Outsiders telling non-conservation stories

For this study, only B and C are relevant. B is the first part of the research presented in chapter 5 and 6 of the study. C is the second part of the research presented in chapter 9.

With respect to the first part there are some ethical considerations for the researcher. Waters-Bayer (1994) has discussed the problem of this kind of ethics in an article in which she puts emphasis on the ethics of documenting indigenous knowledge. In this discussion she makes a theoretical distinction between extractive and enriching research. The former is mainly meant to give information to development makers. The latter is done by locals themselves and leads to enlarge their knowledge in order to be able to deal with external influences on daily life.

Waters-Bayer acknowledges that it will always be difficult to find a balance between documenting indigenous accomplishments and making valuable knowledge available to

others who might misuse it. According to the author it depends on how documentation is realised, whether it breaks down the barriers of defence around indigenous and informal systems or strengthens and supports them. It is important that information becomes available not only for the educated and powerful but also for the illiterate. Her conclusion is that more visual and oral ways of documenting and sharing knowledge such as songs, theatre and dance are needed, praising not only traditional knowledge, but also indigenous innovation.

Local stories may thus be an excellent instrument for enriching research. The problem is, however, that in this case the research is not carried out by locals themselves. Quite the contrary, my impulsive reaction in the cinema of Yaounde reveals the supra-local bias I have due to my own background. It gives the research a confusing status between the two types distinguished by Waters-Bayer. Strangely enough it is not the extractive part that has provoked moral opposition. Listening to stories and documenting them has been done before in many studies. The moral criticisms on this research rather concern the part of actively using stories as a communication tool and in this way manipulating and dominating locals in an even more sophisticated way than has been done in history. This is what I indicated above as situation C. How to deal with this criticism?

Let me first say that although criticism may help to look at the research more carefully, I believe that the potential moral risks should not restrain people from trying alternatives to improve an unsatisfactory situation. The risk of too much criticism is that it may lead to scepticism and passivity to really improve communication. The present use of traditional and non-controversial methods of communication without really reaching the local people can be considered to be morally objectionable as well (c.f. Bouman, 1998 p.37). After all, in a globalising world the interactions between local and supra-local ideas will only intensify more in the future. Real enriching research should not avoid communication. It should rather make contrasts more visible. Dealing with the problems of intercultural communication requires intercultural researchers. Especially supra-local viewpoints, provided by these researchers, are needed to tackle potential misuse of stories by supra-locals. Giving the appropriate feedback and information to locals by telling them supra-local stories should in this view also be called enriching research, although not done by locals themselves.

It should be noted that the manipulative character of stories does not only count from supra-local to local. It also operates from local to supra-local, and certainly among locals stories are used to express and convey norms and values. Stories are always imbedded in a web of relations and balances of power between people (Fairhead and Leach, 1995; Stott and Sullivan, 2000). The big variety of ethnic groups in Cameroon[9] has always traditionally dealt with power differences. This will also inevitably have its consequences for the interaction of these groups with the environment. This implies that stories on the environment should always be considered in the context in which they are told. For this reason attention will be

[9] See for further information on ethnic groups chapter 4.

paid to the setting of storytelling both on a micro-level (research question 1) as well as in the wider context of Cameroon.

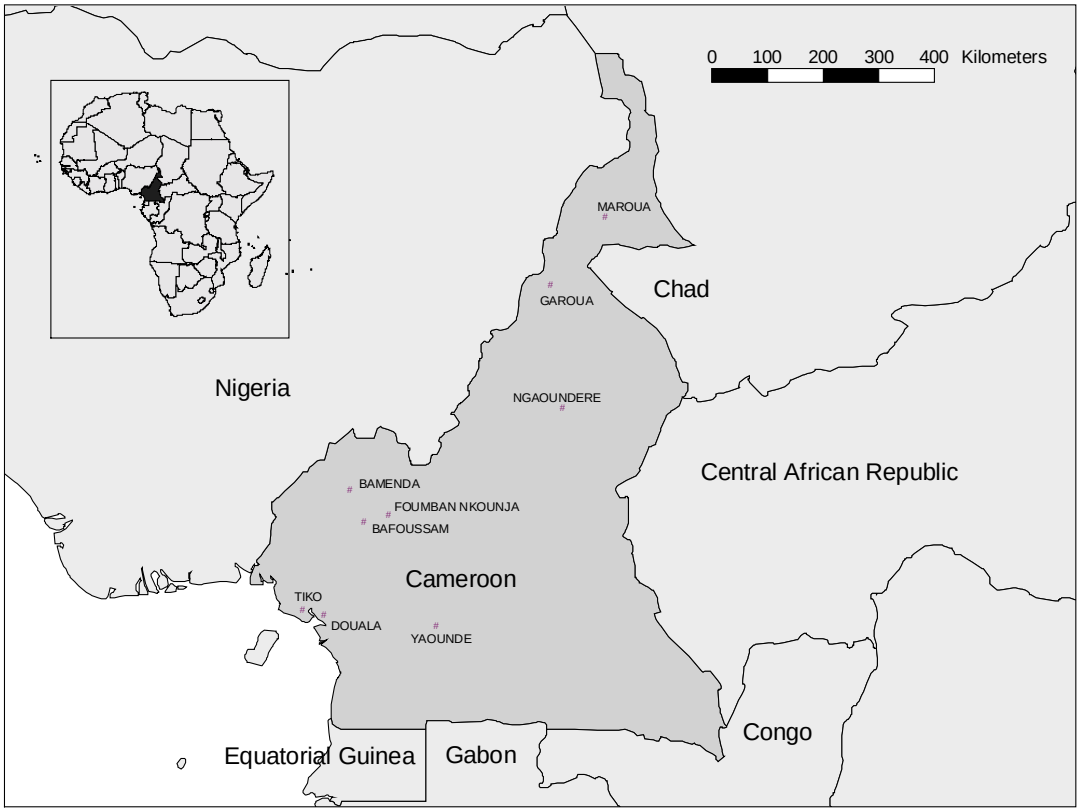
In spite of these defensive arguments, the research should definitely take into consideration the constructive side of the criticism. Therefore, it will consider both parties of the communication process: local and supra-local. Furthermore, it will not avoid uncovering latent difficulties found in the communication. Moreover, in order to reduce mistakes in the active use of stories, emphasis will be put in this research on listening to local stories and learning from them. As we shall see, the active use of stories by supra-locals will be limited to a rather theoretical level, supported by a modest number of try-outs in the field. The results of these experiments are merely leading to conclusions that are especially meant to stimulate the communication process and that could be followed up by concrete locally operating organisations.

The final remark I want to make about this dissertation concerns its strong multidisciplinary character. In fact it deals with four disciplines: anthropology, literary studies, environmental science and communication science. I believe that precisely in the world of environmental communication there is a need for the co-operation of various disciplines. However, simply putting these disciplines together would lead to multidisciplinary research, which still does not have a surplus value. The profit could only be obtained from interdisciplinary research that tries to combine the essential elements of the various disciplines and goes beyond the limits of each discipline. This research definitely is a multidisciplinary research but it aims to contribute to interdisciplinary research.

The multisided character of the research may be both a weakness and a strength. It is a weakness since it will never satisfy the demands of each discipline and may lead to more general and superficial conclusions than a mono-disciplinary research. It is a strength since it may open possibilities for new ways of looking at a problem, not being limited by details and coloured by the axioms and paradigms of each discipline. Regarding the final research question, however, I think there is a need to accept the challenge and to include multidisciplinary variables, exactly because one wants stories to be a general and practical instrument.

Combining different disciplines automatically means limitation, and choices had to be made with regard to the approach of the research. Consequently, some methodological decisions had to be taken into consideration. The theoretical justification for these choices is further explained in the second chapter of the book. The choices will be mentioned in short here.

Firstly, stories are considered as dynamic and flexible tools of communication, not as static texts. So focus is put on extra-textual aspects of the stories. Although theories from narratology have been used they are only discussed as far as they are useful for the research



Map 1.1.: Cameroon.

questions. It also implies that in this book stories are not published in local language. Furthermore, no detailed text studies of the stories have been made in this research.

Secondly, in order to be able to generalise the findings, two areas in Cameroon have been chosen to carry out the fieldwork. Limiting the research to one ethnical group or one limited ecosystem may have led to false and premature conclusions with regard to the research question. Cameroon is one of the most varied countries of the world with regard to ecosystems and cultural traditions. For the purpose of the research I have chosen to compare two completely different regions in Cameroon (see map 1.1): the Far North province (around Maroua: Muslim, savannah, presence of a national park) and Central Province (around Yaoundé: Christian, forest/savannah, little intervention of environmental organisations). Furthermore, different villages were chosen in each region in order to deal with the ethnical diversity within each region. This may have some methodological consequences. Dealing with many anthropological parameters makes it scientifically impossible to do in-depth research on all aspects.

In this section I have discussed some considerations that lie at the basis of this research and the pragmatic choices being a result of these considerations. Taken into account these choices we now come to the structure of the book.

1.4 The structure of the book

After the general introduction in this first chapter, the second chapter will provide a theoretical framework for the research. Since it concerns rather exploratory research I did not use one specific theory on which to build my research. Nevertheless, investigating stories as an instrument for intercultural communication on environment needs a theoretical framework to rely on. One cannot talk about a discourse or communication without knowing the basic principles of communication theory. Subsequently, the communication-tool itself has to be further analysed. Theories about stories and storytelling will be explored in order to understand what specific role stories can play in communication. Furthermore the subject of the discourse should be defined and discussed. Does a concept such as environment or nature mean the same thing to everybody? Combining the previous items the final concluding section presents some key concepts for a storytelling dialogue on environment.

In chapter 3 the research methodology will be explained and justified. This includes methodology for all three stages of the research, namely collecting, analysing and telling stories.

As explained in the introduction, I have started my research with collecting and analysing local stories. The general setting in which this was done provides, of course, the historical, ecological, cultural and political context in which these stories are told and understood. Chapter 4 presents this context: the two different research areas in Cameroon and the people living in these areas.

In chapter 5 the local stories that were collected are presented, analysed and discussed. Attention is paid to the setting in which the stories were told. Furthermore, both the format as well as the content of stories is discussed. In this way this chapter gives a general overview of the present-day world of stories in Cameroon.

Once we know the story universe, we come to the second part. Deeper analyses of these stories need to be made in relation to nature and the environment, the subject of the dialogue. This is done in chapter 6.

In order to come to a symmetrical two-way dialogue, the same procedure of collecting and analysing should be done for the supra-local stories. This could of course provide enough material for another dissertation. In this study, however, the focus is on local stories and supra-local stories should serve as a comparison. To achieve this I have explored some common environmental narratives as case material. These will be discussed in chapter 7.

In chapter 8 both story universes, the local and the supra local, are compared and contrasted. Naturally, these categories are not static and exclusive. On the contrary, it is an ongoing process of change and interaction. After all, it is this interaction that counts. An

important influence in this interaction to be discussed is the ongoing process of globalisation. More than anything else, globalisation makes that people and people's stories meet and interact.

Subsequently we come to the third part of the research. After collecting and analysing stories we now come to the telling of stories. As has been explained in the former section, this is the practical and instrumental part of the research and probably also the most problematic one. Therefore I will deal with this part mostly on a theoretical basis, providing suggestions and further material for discussion. However, some experiments with stories have been done in the field. The theoretical reflections as well as these experiments are discussed in chapter 9.

Finally, chapter 10 summarises the major findings and presents the conclusions of the research.

Throughout the whole book, I will use examples of stories. As has been indicated shortly and will be further explained in the next chapter, the definition of a story is rather broad. It may refer to long tales starting with 'once upon a time' or to short anecdotes recounting an event. In most cases short narratives, part of narratives or commentaries will be presented in the text itself. In case I discuss integral local stories, these stories will be presented (transcribed as literally as possible) in separate boxes in the sections making it easier to refer to in further discussion.

2 Theoretical backgrounds

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present the theoretical backgrounds that are considered to be necessary for answering the research questions and that help to justify some choices that were made (such as those explained in section 1.2.3). This chapter elaborates on the three main concepts of the central research question:

- The process: communication or dialogue,
- The instrument to realise the process: stories and storytelling,
- The final focus or subject of the process (or: the substance of the dialogue): environmental conservation.

In this chapter I will discuss these three elements successively. Section 2.2 gives an overview of the insights from the communication science. In section 2.3 I will explore the chosen tool, the instrument of communication: stories, and the question how to place stories in the appropriate context for this study. To achieve this, we will first follow the historical track in social sciences to see how stories have been studied and understood in the past. Secondly, one cannot deal with stories without discussing the basic insights of the study of stories: narratology. This will be discussed in section 2.4. In section 2.5, the key subject of the communication in this thesis: 'the environment' will be further analysed. After all, this concept is initially defined in supra-local terms that may not at all be shared by everyone. Finally, section 2.6 tries to synthesise the theory into a suitable basis for carrying out the research.

The collection of these different insights will serve as a framework for this dissertation. Apart from this general framework, however, there are more specific theories that will be discussed in the different sections they apply to. Some examples of these are the theoretical frameworks about new ecology and political ecology, as will be discussed in chapter 8. Moreover, in chapters 6.9 and 8, I will discuss ideas from the Cameroonian philosopher, Marcien Towa. These ideas contrast with what was expressed by, among others, the negritude movement that put the focus on fundamental differences between local and supra-local. Instead, Towa emphasises the common ground of rationality in both cultures, and the importance of debating and so-called 'active thinking'. As we shall see, these ideas will play an important role in the development of stories as a communication tool. Finally, in chapter 9, I will further elaborate on the theoretical grounds for the ethics of using stories.

2.2 Theories of communication

Theories of communication have gone through a process of evolution in the last decades, of which an overview is given in a standard book by Van Woerkum and Van Meegeren (1999).

The classic communication science used as a starting point the so-called sender-receiver model. In this model, communication is defined to be the transmission of information from a theoretically informed sender to a neutral, 'empty' receiver through a medium. This rather simplistic model has been rejected in modern communication science and been replaced by a much more realistic idea that the receiver is an actor who is influenced by a set of visions, opinions and ideas that he/she has already formed through earlier experiences. This influences the way a message is interpreted. The incoming message will thus always be interpreted, embedded in an already existing frame of perception. This frame is not static but continuously changing in a social process of exchanging ideas in which not only cognitive but also emotional and social aspects play an important role (Shadid, 1998). Consequently, in communication there are many elements that play a role, not only on the conscious but also on the unconscious level. In communication science, several authors associate the word 'communication' with the old sender-receiver metaphor and for this reason prefer to use instead the word 'interaction' or 'discourse' (Aarts, 1998 p. 29).

Shadid (1998) mentions three factors that are important for intercultural communication. Firstly, the cultural background of the communication partners. This includes the existing perceptions, norms and values, the understanding of verbal and non-verbal messages including language. For this reason, it is very important for this research to first put emphasis on listening to local stories rather than telling stories to locals. Secondly, the attitude towards the other and the image you have of the other partner and yourself. This refers to prejudices one has about the other but also the image one has of oneself. A feeling of inferiority, for example, may influence the communication process. As has been discussed in chapter 1, one of the benefits expected of using a local method of communication is to up-lift the social status of the local people in order to reduce the imbalance. Thirdly, Shadid mentions the personal communication skills of the partners. It should be clear that especially in this study, it is important to find an answer to the question how to become a good storyteller.

Although Van Woerkum and Van Meegeren (1999, p. 23) make a distinction between informative, persuasive and educational communication, I would state that putting the focus on the dynamics of communication (instead of the static sender-receiver model) implies that each communication is at the same time a form of education, in which education should be understood here as a two-way learning and teaching process. After all, communication always changes, to a certain extent, people's ideas or perceptions. The above-mentioned insights imply that if one wants communication to be effective, one has to study what is called by Miller (2000) 'the frame of perception of one's target group'. This frame will determine to what extent words are understood in the way they were meant by the sender. I

will come back to this in the next section but for now it suffices to say that the more the perception of sender and receiver will correspond, the more one can be sure the message is understood rightfully. Good communication thus implies a shared set of norms and values (Barth, 1994) or as Pinxten (1994) says: *"communication of consciousness presupposes community of unconsciousness."*

This definitely also holds for the present research: intercultural communication, or more precisely a true dialogue on environmental conservation, needs to start from a level on which norms and values are shared. Especially in the intercultural context, it is very plausible that this level does not correspond with such a complicated concept as environmental conservation. Consequently, we have to descend to more fundamental levels that form the basis of what is understood by environmental conservation. While doing this, we will meet issues related to the worldview, such as the position of human beings in the world and the way the world is classified and systematised. Talking about environmental conservation without understanding and agreement on these more fundamental levels would probably be a waste of time. This research should thus aim to find these basic levels from where real communication can start. Particularly in oral cultures, stories may provide a suitable entry to these more fundamental levels or starting points for perception. They may show the fundamental differences that lead to misunderstanding, and finally to conflicts that result from miscommunication.

It is useful for the present study to use a theoretical distinction in two levels of communication related to the two ways of learning (Van Woerkum and Van Meegeren, 1999, p. 15): functional learning and substantial learning. Functional learning is defined as learning within existing frameworks without changing them. Substantial learning means changing these frameworks. The first way is what I would like to call in my dissertation: the concrete level. This concerns the level of communication of concrete knowledge and information. Stories, for instance, often carry ecological information, e.g. what kinds of animals occur and how they behave. Local stories may show what is sometimes called 'folk biology' (Medin & Atran, 1999). Here stories enrich existing knowledge without necessarily changing a certain frame of thinking. As long as sender and receiver understand each other in a technical sense, such as language including the names of various species, this sort of communication in my experience, is a rather smooth process. To a certain extent it is a situation as described in classic communication theory, of a less informed receiver getting filled with information by a better-informed sender. It should be clear that here both local and supra-local can play the role of sender and receiver.

The second level, which is related to substantial learning touches upon the frame of thinking. It includes what I will call in this dissertation 'the worldview level'[1]. Here we deal with the interpretation of information and the consequences for perception. This concerns

[1] Other authors distinguish three rather than two levels, e.g. in De Groot's (1992) Problem in Context framework, the author distinguishes 'interpretation', 'interpretative frames' and 'worldview/ self image'.

issues like the value of nature and the relation between humans and nature. It is on this deeper level that concepts such as intrinsic value and stewardship of nature, to mention two western examples, are found. It should be clear that this level is both the most essential and the most difficult to deal with in the communication process. Especially on this level we have to deal with the complexity of the communication process as explained earlier in this section.

The above-mentioned levels refer to the content of the message and the effects of this content on the audience. Yet, apart from the fundamental understanding of the content of a message, the format in which the message is transferred is of importance for the communication process since it highly determines the degree of listening. After all, the content may be highly relevant and even comprehensible; the receiver should first of all be motivated to listen. Ellingsworth's (see Shadid 1998, p. 181) theory of adaptive intercultural communication emphasises the foreignness of the communication partner. Based on this Ellingsworth assumes that the more adaptation in the functional style of communication takes place, the faster the goal of the communication is reached.

As far as the format is concerned, a special branch of the communication science deserves special attention: the 'entertainment-education strategy'. This strategy, developed at the John Hopkins University Centre for Communication Programs in Baltimore, tries to achieve intensive communication by using the principle: "*if we are amused, we listen*." The strategy looks, among others, for possibilities to give health education to people by using entertainment in media such as radio, television, theatre and storytelling (Bouman 1998). Bouman gives the following definition (p. 25):
"Entertainment-education strategy is the process of purposively designing and implementing a mediating communication form with the potential of entertaining and educating people, in order to enhance and facilitate different stages of behavioural change."
Bouman continues: "*Entertainment-education strategy thus aims to satisfy, among others, the need for information, entertainment and (para)-social interaction."*

Stories, obviously, have a potential for entertainment-education. However, we should be careful with just copying the principles of health-focused entertainment-education, being the focal point of Bouman's dissertation, for this study, since there are some fundamental differences between health education and the subject of this research. I will mention three differences.

First of all, it should be remarked that in the field of health education there are no losers, only winners. It is almost impossible to conceive that anybody would be worse off if people would follow the advice packed in the entertainment-education. For environmental affairs, however, the situation is different. The situation is more complicated in the sense that there is not one single solution that improves the situation for all actors. As may be clear from the case of the Waza National Park (see 1.2.1) as well as from many other examples (Neumann, 1998; Oates, 1999; Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997), there are often winners and losers. For

instance, upstream farmers have to use less water in order to help downstream farmers' irrigation. Or villagers have to hunt less in order for future generations to be able to hunt as well. Or, as is the case around the Waza National Park, people have to suffer from crop damages or cattle predation in order for the elephants and lions to survive. In nature protection cases such as the latter, the situation is further complicated by the fact that we have to deal here with a party that has no voice: the environment[2]. Consequently, the environment needs humans to speak in its interest, and the storyteller himself is the only one who can do so in a storytelling situation.

There is another important difference between health education and the present research. In health education the responsibility and the possibility to influence the situation often lies on the level of every individual citizen whereas environmental affairs deal on a higher and more abstract level that is difficult to see through for an individual. People would, for example, more easily understand the need for keeping their drinking water clean for their own health than for protecting an elephant population for the long-term needs of humanity.

A final difference with the entertainment-education strategy as presented by Bouman concerns the form of entertainment. This dissertation focuses on one of the oldest forms, storytelling, whereas the entertainment-education strategy mainly uses modern mass media such as television. These two forms are quite distinct (see also Bouman, 1998). Mass media for example, are focussed on large groups and have no direct possibility of two-way communication whereas storytelling deals with smaller groups that can give direct feedback.

These three differences especially concern the 'ethical situation' (section 1.3) of the supra-local outsider telling stories to the local people. They will therefore be further dealt with in chapter 9.

In spite of the differences mentioned above, the entertainment-education strategy contains insights that appear to be useful for this research. I will mention two of them. First, the strategy is part of modern communication science, which pays much attention to the importance of unconscious aspects of communication. As has been discussed in the beginning of this section, it shows that communication is highly contextual and determined by the way a message is transferred. Modern communication science makes a theoretical distinction between direct communication versus indirect communication, the latter dealing with the emotional and social aspects of communication. This is in contrast with classical theories that stated that people change their behaviour because they are aware of the risks they take and simply deliberate the pros and cons of each behaviour (see Bouman, 1998). In elder theories, education is thus focused merely on cognition and negates the influence of emotion on decision-making, whereas modern theories include both aspects.

Indirect communication may be of great importance for the present research. The target group we want to communicate with does, in general, not deal with life in the same way as is

[2] It could be argued that also in health education there are issues, such as public health, that have no voice and could contrast with individual interests

current in the scientific or intellectual scene. Especially in the case of politically charged subjects, such as environmental conservation with which locals have been confronted for a long time, many social issues like power and livelihood play a prominent role. This makes it rather useless to focus on a single message without taking into account emotional and social factors and hence indirect communication is very important. Through the indirect route one can attract the attention, improve the power of the message, better involve the target group in the problem and update the already gained knowledge (Van Woerkum in Aarts, 1998, p.28). Furthermore, indirect communication is also important in case the risks are not always clear. After all, in these cases it is difficult to formulate a concrete message based on a calculation of pros and cons and decision-making depends on more than just a rational assessment of facts. One obvious analogue between health education and environmental care is that in both cases the consequences of human behaviour have their effect on the long term and often in an indirect way.

A second insight to be gained from entertainment-education, related to what is mentioned above, is that entertainment-education theory is built on the 'theory of social learning'. This theory states that people do not only learn in formal learning situations such as schools but especially in informal and social contexts, e.g. by observing other people's behaviour (see Van Woerkum & Van Meegeren, 1999, p.69). In practice, non-governmental environmental organisations such as WWF-Cameroon do realise this partly by developing environmental education programs in both a formal and an informal way (WWF, pers. comm.). The latter, consisting of radio programs, games and village meetings, appear to be more important in the research area of the Far North of Cameroon since only 10 percent of the children go to school (Zwaal, 1997). Aarts (1998) who has done research on perception of nature among farmers in the Netherlands, points out that many attempts at communication have failed because they were too formal, the language was too difficult and the setting was too serious. According to the author this has led to a lack of interest and understanding of the target group. In rural areas in Cameroon communication between villagers mainly takes place in the form of informal everyday talks in the village. For effective two-way communication with these villagers, access to this informal world in which stories play an important role, seems paramount.

It should be noted that, while using the entertainment-education theory, I assume that stories have an implicit didactic value. This is partly justified because, as we shall see, many stories contain implicitly or explicitly a moral message. However, the question is whether in practice stories are always told with the intention to teach. Theoretically, the easiest way to get an answer to this question is to directly ask it to the storytellers. Brinkman (1996), who did so, concludes from her research on gender norms in Kikuyu narratives that the didactic context of stories is a general framework for the storytellers to base their stories on. However, she adds that different individual strategies determine the final didactic status of a story. As pointed out by Brinkman, this status can be reduced by putting emphasis on the

fictional elements of the story, by not being clear about good and bad, and by reference to hierarchical structures that do not correspond with the opinion of the storyteller. In short: by a discrepancy between the world described in the story and the perceived reality in everyday life. In spite of these particular differences, which will definitely be analysed in the present research too, Brinkman's work supports the assumption made by many authors that stories have a didactic value.

So far, we have discussed insights with respect to the content and form of the communication process. A final point of interest concerns the relation between the different parties. The entertainment-education strategy, as well as storytelling in particular, could be seen as being part of a larger collection of participatory methods (Chambers, 1994, Drijver, 1991, Engel & Salomon, 1997). Although these methods appear to be very promising, in reality it does not always mean that parties co-operate. On the contrary, the methods often make explicit the different interests of the parties, which easily evokes conflict (Guijt & Shah, 1998; Mosse, 1994). As has been stated in chapter 1, real communication should not ignore these conflicts. When studying communication and understanding these conflicts, one cannot escape from the role of power between the different parties that communicate (Aarts, 1998; Heyman, 1999). This refers in the first place to the historical power differences between western and developing countries. Many communication projects are embedded in a linear top-down model of one-way transference of knowledge from the source of this knowledge, in this case from Western science, to locals, presented as being passive and non-informed. This linear model has had a lot of negative impact in developing countries (Röling and Groot, 1999).

Power does not only refer to the struggle for material goods but also to the struggle for meaning (Driessen en De Jonge, 1994). Bourdieu (see Pinxten, 1991) calls this 'symbolic power'. It refers to the power to create and manipulate meaning by being able to define things, processes and concepts. Scientist, as well as other NGO and GO agents, far more than rural peasants, have acquired the authority to frame governmental understandings and responses to environmental and natural resource issues (Miller, 2000). For creating a two-way dialogue it is thus of utmost importance to be aware of, for example, the use of specific concepts that may not automatically be shared by local people in Cameroon. The use of stories instead of formal texts for communication could help to reduce this imbalance of symbolic power between locals and supra-locals. On the other hand, it should be noticed that the importance of symbolic power does not only play a significant role in the interaction between local and supra local but also locally, between the different ethnic groups, and hence stories in particular could be expected to play an important role.[3]

[3] Although a detailed study on the power relationships between different groups goes beyond the scope of this research, some questions could be asked about the influence of power on local stories. One question is, for example, whether a story is appropriated to a specific ethnic group and how this influences the impact of the

In this section the different aspects of the communication process were discussed as well as some factors that influence this process. In the next two sections I will focus on the instrument: the potential role of stories in communication

2.3 The role of stories and storytelling in human culture

Why choose stories as a starting point for this research? Is this simply because stories are nice to hear, stories are told everywhere in the world and so forth? In this section I will try to give some more arguments for why and how stories in particular can play an important role in the dialogue on environmental conservation at an intercultural level.

First of all it is important to give a definition of what I mean by 'stories'. Stories in fact include here all kinds of genres varying from fiction stories, such as fairy tales, to non-fiction life stories that relate concrete happenings in the past. As I will explain in chapter 5, there are many categories that are a mixture of the two extremes of fact and fiction. Because of this wide and undefined range we could say that in fact every monologue can be called a story. With this supposition I link up with the 'narrative paradigm' as developed by Fischer (1987). This paradigm implies that human communication should be viewed, historically as well as situationally, as stories or accounts competing with other stories or accounts purportedly constituted by good reasons. Communication is rational when the stories satisfy the demands of narrative probability (among others the consistency of characters and actions) and the narrative fidelity. Moreover, the stories inevitably act as moral inducements (p. 58). Fischer proposes that human beings are inherently storytellers who have the natural capacity to recognise the coherence and fidelity of the stories they tell and experience (p. 24). People can thus be seen as *homo narrans* (p. 63). With this, Fischer opposes the rational-world paradigm that has existed since Aristotle, presupposing that humans are essentially rational and decisions are made on arguments referring to a world that is a set of logical puzzles that can be solved through analysis (see p. 59). Besides confirming what has been said about indirect communication in the previous section, the narrative paradigm is particularly interesting for intercultural communication since it does not limit itself to a thinking elite that is able to develop philosophies, but it includes all (sub)cultures, whether folk or scientific, since all persons understand their own lives in terms of narratives. Traditional rationality (based on Aristotle) could thus be seen as only a part of the narrative rationality.

Although the narrative paradigm may be a good counterweight for the rational hegemony, the danger is that it can lead to an extreme form of postmodernism. However, I do not believe that all stories have the same value with respect to reality. For understanding and dealing with reality, in particular with problems such as those related to the environment, one needs a combination of good stories and rational argumentation. As explained in chapter 1, I

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story. To provide a context, in chapter 4 some information will be given about the situation of ethnic groups and their history in Cameroon.

prefer a moderate form of postmodernism, which means that not all arguments should simply be called 'stories'.

However, for methodological reasons it may be helpful for this study to interpret stories in a wider context. This means in the first place that, apart from pure tales, the narrative paradigm also includes similar forms of expression such as songs, riddles and proverbs. In narratology (see also next section), theoretical support is found for this approach. Proverbs and metaphors are called mini-narratives by Bal (1997) since one word may evoke or present a whole story. On page 35 we read:

"The interpretation of metaphor as a mini-narrative yields insight, not into what the speaker means but into what a cultural community considers acceptable interpretation, so acceptable that they are not considered to be metaphorical at all and certainly not narrative."

For practical reasons, however, I have not done extensive research on these categories (see chapter 3). The same applies to written literature. On the difference between oral and written texts much has been said in the literature (e.g. Finnegan, 1988). I will come back to this later in this section. The fact that alternative forms such as songs and proverbs are not prominent in this research, however, does not mean that theoretically the definition of stories excludes these categories. Wherever available and useful in this dissertation, examples will be given of these alternative forms of stories.

A more important consequence of using a broad definition of stories is the inclusion of the global environmental discourse in the realm of storytelling. In other words: it makes it possible to talk about supra-local stories when referring to statements and ideas that show up in the environmental discourse. Although, as stated before, not all stories have the same status with respect to reality, for methodological reasons the term stories is used here for all accounts with a temporal-causal logic in them. For practical reasons, to make a distinction between stories as units as they could be told by, for example, bards in Africa, and stories as a wider concept covering all sorts of accounts including the environmental discourse, I prefer in this dissertation to use the term 'narrative' for the latter. With this term I link up with earlier literature about supra-local narratives, among others I refer to Roe's (1991, 1995) development narratives, to Fairhead & Leach (1995) and Stott (1999) who calls them environmental narratives. It could be remarked that compared to stories in general, these narratives are characterised by being extremely truth-claiming. Having made this distinction between story (either local or supra-local) and narrative, let me first concentrate on the narrow concept of local stories.

Stories as part of the oral tradition of practically all cultures have always been a favourite subject for social scientists. It might be interesting to follow for a while the history of the study of stories in anthropology. In much ethnography in the past stories have been collected and analysed. Initially this was done in the school of structuralism, mainly inspired by Levi-Strauss. He carried out in-depth studies on the significance of each story element for ritual

and social life (e.g. Levi-Strauss, 1974a). Although there is a lot to say about his research, I confine myself here to one general characteristic of his approach: in his studies, myths (as a particular type of story) were considered to be isolated texts, studied outside the storytelling context. Different versions were compared in a continuous attempt to develop schemes to mythologize separate story elements, and to relate form and content of a story. Levi-Strauss' analysis referred to symbolic and psychological explanation of unconscious fears, taboos and dreams of a certain group of people[4].

With respect to the question about the origin of stories the same neglect of context occurred. Herein there have been two approaches. The first is historic-geographic, assuming that all stories stem from one original source. The second is the approach of cultural evolution, assuming simultaneous developments. Because of the theoretical presumptions, both approaches were concerned with texts only, out of their social and cultural context, treating "disembodied stuff floating around the map almost by itself" (Bauman, 1998).

In spite of all the valuable insights that formed the basis for further research in that field, it should be concluded that the structuralistic approach is not very useful for the present research. After all, for intercultural communication we need a more practical and flexible approach in which stories are considered as dynamic instruments instead of inviolable and unchanging cultural heritages. The conservative character of the structuralistic approach may be caused by its focus on the text, and in that way it may be related to what Cheney & Weston (1999, p.121) say about the written word as final form of a fixed text:

"*The written word turns the world into a passive object for human knowledge and thus focuses our attention on language as a sign system primarily designed to encode beliefs whereas attention should be paid to the performative function of language."*

According to the authors, the western world is visually oriented which makes written words so important. *"Originally in oral cultures*", say Cheney & Weston (p.122), *"stories pass down the modes of action, which when written down come to be understood as information."*

I think that intercultural communication, because of its performative objective should focus on the performative function of stories, *i.e.* the appropriate modes of action they express and the impact of stories on action – both of which are highly contextual.

An interesting approach to the stories, that is of special relevance to the present study, can be found in the work of the French philosopher, Bourdieu. Being a student of Levi-Strauss he dedicated his earlier life to the structural analyses of myth but later turned to 'praxeology' or 'the theory of praxis'. In his theory, Bourdieu (1980, see also Pinxten 1994) introduced the concept of *habitus*: a system of cognitive and motivational dispositions (or subconscious schemes) that are the basis of thinking, perceiving and acting. According to Bourdieu, stories are form-given dispositions that are dynamic and regulating. They give

[4] In this context Levi-Strauss mentions rituals as strongly related to myth, being the expression of the perceived tension between myth and reality.

meaning to people's behaviour in the context of time and space. Stories reflect the *habitus*, prescribe behaviour and act as a long-term memory. Moreover, they form a safe world in which one can 'try out' behaviour that is not according to the formal prescriptions. This can be seen clearly when looking at contrasts in stories, such as a very divergent behaviour of a story character. In many stories, expression of such behaviour finally comes to a negative result, which then confirms the existing norms.

With his praxiology Bourdieu asserts that the subject-object dichotomy, which was characteristic for the anthropological studies of stories so far, is false. Rather an interaction of subjects exists. Fact and data, including stories, are the result of such interactions (Bourdieu, 1980). In praxeology, the focus has thus changed from a one-sided study of stories to a more two-sided dialogue.

After Bourdieu, many other scientists have continued this line. Finnegan (1992) says that the story is a reflection of reality but the story (and thus the storyteller) also creates reality. Cheney & Weston (1999, p. 130) state: "*Theories are fully intelligible only when embedded in stories. Stories are the real homes of the so-called thick moral concepts, concepts in which evaluation and description are so intertwined as to be conceptually inseparable*."

Particularly in postmodernist philosophy, stories are brought in direct relation to the concept of culture. In postmodernism, culture is no longer seen as a cognitive structure in the heads of people but as a matter of continuous interpretation, as communication between people through language, music and stories. Or as Geertz (1973) expresses it: Culture is a text that everybody reads in his particular way. These insights imply that the study of culture needs an interpretative approach, in which the signification that people attribute to their behaviour becomes a central point (Aarts, 1998). Or as Van Vucht Tijssen & Van Reijen (1991, p.47) state: *"mentality and world vision are interlinked and we need to investigate how."* Stories may help to fulfil this need. They may help to uncover worldviews and the performative linkage between these worldviews and the way people act.

After having discussed the role of stories in general, let me now focus on their role with respect to the specific topic of this dissertation: the environment.

Stories may thus reflect how people deal with reality and why they do so, including problems that occur in this reality. Environmental problems in particular display a great degree of interpretative openness (Collins & Pinch, 1982). Miller (2000) discusses the importance of how societies choose to frame environmental problems. 'Framing' refers here to the particular lenses, worldviews and underlying assumptions that guide communal interpretation and definition of particular issues. Using the concept of framing in the environmental discourse acknowledges that the way societies view the environment is not simply given by that environment but also reflects cognitions and collective moral choices about the myriad intersections of natural and human systems. According to Miller, framing has its influence on assessments of environmental change, including risks and

responsibilities. Although beyond the scope of this research, it would be interesting to see how frames emerge and acquire credibility in particular societies.

Like science, narratives are a way of framing, a way of making sense of the world. Narratives emphasise the importance of meaning in the framing process contrary to the emphasis of science on getting the facts straight (Miller, 2000). Different frames, narrative, scientific or others, may operate simultaneously. In other words, one person may be inspired by different stories at the same time. Therefore, framing is a dynamic process and it should be recognised that frames need not be taken as given. This holds for local as well as supra-local frames. With respect to the latter, Fairhead and Leach (1996a and b) show the danger of developing a frame (a story) in one context, a specific place and time, and applying them without reflection to another context. I will come back to this in detail when discussing a specific case in section 6.4.2.

Considering storytelling as framing, as, for example, Millar (1996) does, provides a playing field for dialogue, since local as well as supra-local insights could be considered as narratives of essentially equal status. In order to be successful, for instance, both require a coherence of the narrative, an apparent orderliness of particular clustering of elements. Narrative elements such as settings, plot lines and characterisations cannot be mixed randomly. I would call this the logic of the story. Stories have underlying principles that are corresponding to those in real life. Bremond states in his real-life theory (see Bal, 1997 p. 188) that the narrated universal is regulated by the same rules as those that control human thoughts and actions. Stories are constructed based on the human logic of events. That is what makes them understandable for people. To be meaningful, a story should thus somehow fit into a system of existing logic, which is definitely determined historically and culturally.

However, it should be noted that when collecting stories in Cameroon (as probably anywhere else), one could immediately notice that there are many fantastic or absurd stories that in their literal interpretation do not comply at all with the logic of reality. According to Bremond, this does not mean that there is no reality. On the contrary, the destruction of a reality or the search for alternatives does imply the existence of that reality.[5] We could therefore say that stories either fit in or partly 'play with' a system of existing logic. Several authors (e.g. Alvarez & Merchán, 1992; Vuorela, 1995) have stated that reality and fiction are no opposites. Fiction (latin: *fictio* means fabricated) is a way to find and understand reality. This principle can be found back in fantasy, absurdities and humour (Bal, 1997). The education philosopher Scheffler (1983) says that once the prejudice of fiction as opposed to

[5] Related to build up of reality is the use of oppositions in the stories. Oppositions play an important role in narratives. Actors have to continuously deal with ideological oppositions in the world they operate. These oppositions can manifest themselves in different ways, among others in the description of personages (e.g. small versus big), and locations (e.g. high versus low, nature versus human world). The importance of oppositions for cultural studies is illustrated by Bal (1997, p. 217): *"the point is not to notice, confirm or denounce oppositions but to confront the oppositions we notice with those we hold ourselves, and to use differences between them as a tool to break their tyranny."*

truth has been removed, it is possible to explain why fiction provides a special kind of knowledge. According to Scheffler, the main point is that, by connecting emotion and cognition, stories expand our experience of reality, enabling us to grasp new relations among things and to enrich our feeling as well as our understanding.

The connection between emotion and cognition in fact refers to the basic principles of modern communication theories (see section 2.2.). The mixture of reality and fiction, and to how deal with this in the interpretation of stories will play an important role in the analysis of local narratives (see also section 6.2).

Although stories refer to real life, we may conclude that they often do so in an indirect way. As can be seen most clearly in fictional stories, a literal interpretation of the text does not bring us to the right conclusions about real life. In a non-fictional story that tells us about what will happen when the world ends, the world is presented as a mat that is finally rolled up by God (see also section 5.6.4). Here the image of a mat is probably used as a metaphor, telling us a lot about life in an indirect way. This means that while looking for stories which have environmental relevance, one should not only look for stories that directly deal with literal environmental elements such as animals or trees. On the contrary, many animal stories, as we shall see, are fables and may merely deal with the human society whereas stories that do not contain any animal characters may include certain information or messages that are important because it motivates certain human behaviour with respect to the environment.

Concluding this section, what can we learn from the different theories? Firstly, the narrative paradigm justifies the methodological approach that both local and supra local ways to perceive the environment and environmental conservation are based on stories that do not fundamentally differ in mechanisms that make them reliable or compelling. Secondly, the context of the storytelling, as well as the extra textual elements of a story, is of high importance. We should thus consider a story not as a static text but as a dynamic and performative expression of culture. Finally, stories are reflecting underlying principles of understanding the world. To get more insight into these principles, it is not sufficient to look at the literal story as a whole but it is important to analyse different story elements. For the latter, especially, I now turn to insights from the narratology science, to be discussed in the next section.

2.4 Narratology: the theory of storytelling

The fact that stories occur in all cultures, countries, and periods of history suggests, according to Barthes (see Bal, 1997), the existence of a general model that makes stories recognisable as such. A general characteristic of African stories, for example, is according to Paulme (1976) the plot of the story. Stories start with a situation of equilibrium that gets disturbed and is finally restored in a new way. The course of the plot can vary a lot, however, related to the position of the hero or anti-hero. It may be upward (hero wins), downward

(anti-hero wins), cyclic, reflective (anti-hero imitates hero and gets punished) or the two personages end up in the opposite way as in the beginning.

The discovery and analysis of such patterns is part of narratology, the study of stories. About narratology Bal (1997) wrote a synthesising book. Although narratology provides in the first place a structuralistic way to analyse and categorise stories, Bal gives a wider definition (p.222) corresponding to what is discussed in the former section: *"narrative is a cultural attitude, narratology is a perspective on culture."*

Although the present research is not meant to be a literary study on stories but rather an exploration of the role of stories as an instrument for communication, I will use some insights from narratology that may help to categorise and analyse the stories collected. In addition, narratology gives insights to make the link between two facets of stories: the format and the content. Finally, it is a useful base for the second part of the research (see section 1.2.3), *i.e*. for composing new stories that could be told to local people in Cameroon.

Early studies of stories were influenced by structuralism and mainly focused on the categorisation of stories. Categorisation does not only refer to the content of a story, but particularly also to the format of a story. As we all know, a story can be told in many different ways. Many format elements in stories may serve a practical use. The presence of songs or rhyme verses, for example, makes the story less flexible for variation and better to remember for the storyteller. But the format also determines the way a story is understood. In Europe, stories that start with 'once upon a time' are automatically categorised as fairy tales and thus considered to be fiction. The format of a story is thus of influence on the status of the story and through that on the impact of the story on its listeners.

The categorisation of stories and notably the definition of what constitutes a myth gained a lot of attention in the past. In the literature we can find many definitions. Cohen (1969) defines a myth as being sacred, symbolic and fictional. According to Paulme (1976) the difference between story and myth is that stories deal with individual resolvable situations whereas a myth refers to social problems that concern the whole community. Fischer (1987, p. 76) states that the most compelling, persuasive stories are mythic in form, stories reflective of 'public dreams' that give meaning and significance to life. Therefore, a myth often refers to origin or transformation.

However, it seems to be difficult to achieve an unambiguous vision about what a myth is (Propp, 1968; Levi-Strauss, 1974a). In spite of her attempts to define a myth, Paulme explained in a later work (1984) that myth can deteriorate to a normal story and rituals can become ordinary conducts. This makes the whole distinction between myth and a normal story more fluid and probably less relevant for this research. An *a priori* attempt makes such

disputable categorisations of stories collected in Cameroon a limitation for understanding this form of local communication.[6]

Instead, there are two alternative ways to categorise a collection of stories. In the first place it may be more important to consider local categorisations and naming of stories. In the second place it could be important to look for characteristics of different stories. More recently, Mullan (1996, pers.comm.) has made a classification of stories that is based on concrete characteristics concerning both format and content of the story. This makes it more suitable as a starting point for the present research. Based on this and on Zemke (1990), Neuhauser (1993) and Amtoft (1994) the following distinctions can be made:

- Negative stories (focusing on punishment and fear) versus positive stories (focusing on respect and understanding),
- Stories ending with a fact versus stories ending with a question,
- Traditional, conservative stories versus shocking, revolutionary stories,
- Stories told from the human versus the animal viewpoint,
- Stories told in neutral spoken text versus stories with songs, different voices etc.,
- Monologues versus stories that need interaction with the audience.

It should be noted, however, that the discussion of some type of stories is only important here because it relates to the impact of stories on listeners, and especially on the question which impact specific features of a story have. In order to elaborate more on this question, let me first present some terms and concepts that are common in narratology (see Bal, 1997).

In narratology a distinction is made between three layers of the story, namely: text, story and fabula. Fabula is defined as a series of logical and chronological events[7] caused or experienced by actors. The story is the way in which the fabula is presented. The text is the medium through which the story is told. To summarise:

"It is by way of text that the reader has access to the story of which the fabula is, so to speak, a memorial trace that remains with the reader after completion of the reading."

The fabula is a result of the interpretation of the reader or listener that is influenced by his acquaintance with the original text and by the manipulations of the story. Related to the fabula, narratology becomes a cultural study since interpretations are always a consequence of cultural conditions. Although the text determines the degree of influence since it can be telling, describing or arguing, it is the middle layer, the story, that is most interesting with

[6] This also justifies the starting point made in the previous section to consider stories in a wider context including songs, proverbs, metaphors, histories etc.

[7] Events are processes, transitions from one state to another. It concerns mainly two or more actors and a confrontation. Actors can be persons but also representatives of a group with the same characteristics. In the latter case it is called actant. On the whole there is a principle that says that the broader the orientation of the fabula towards the outside world, the more actors it holds. The more a fabula is oriented on one subject the less actors are normally encountered.

regard to potential manipulation of the audience by the storyteller and hence to the impact of the storyteller on the audience. According to Bal this is the central point (op. Cit. p. 220-221) of a story:

"Narrative is a construction rather than reconstruction. In argumentation the story fulfils a function of persuasion and distraction. Who's to say that narrative serves the truth?"

At first sight manipulation has a negative connotation in the context of this study. After all, it relates to the remarks made in the introduction about moral consequences of intentionally using stories for communication. It should be realised, however, that every story contains certain norms and no text succeeds in being completely free of alternative interpretations or ambiguity (Suleiman, 1983; Brinkman, 1996). Norms may be made explicit like in didactic, moral stories or they may be more implicit or hidden, leaving space for alternative versions. Since stories are a way of framing (see former section), this difference does not only depend on the story but also on the storyteller. The research mentioned before on Kikuyu narratives shows that men tend to end a story with a clear moral conclusion whereas women do not since they find that lesson has to remain implicit leaving it up to the listener (Brinkman, 1996). To qualify this a little more, Bakhtin distinguishes centripetal and centrifugal forces that are both present in each story. The former focuses on agreement and hierarchy of interpretation whereas the latter stimulates openness of meaning (see Brinkman, 1996 p.9).

So all stories somehow persuade and manipulate the listener. But how does this manipulation work? Narratology may provide a suitable basis for understanding. Bal (1997) gives some indications. Firstly, the most important and most subtle tool for manipulation is what Bal calls focalisation (see also Rimmon-Kenan, 1988; Fludernik, 1996). Focalisation operates on three layers simultaneously, namely:

- The actor in the fabula: he who causes or experiences an event, the one who acts,
- The focalizer in the story: from whose perspective the story is told, the one who sees,
- The narrator in the text: who tells the story, the one who speaks. This can be an external narrator (third person) or character-bound narrator (first person).

On the fabula level, Miller (2000) gives a practical example of how focalisation can manipulate by using the narrative about carbon dioxide and climate change The author states that construction of meaning depends, among others, on ideas about who or what is acting as an agent in a particular causal narrative (p.212). He reports about two different approaches, from a local and a global perspective, drawing very different conclusions about the relationship between social and environmental change from comparable sources of data (p.217). According to the author, both versions are true though the emphasis is different. In the local perspective, human actions have practically no impact since climate change is much more provoked by external (geophysical) factors. In fact, we could say that in this version the main actor is non-human. In the global version people are much more prominent as an actor.

This difference in focalisation leads to different conclusions with respect to responsibility and possible solutions.

In analysing the stories, I will mostly deal with the two lower levels. Different focalizers may operate in one story. The final impression a story makes depends on the space that is given to each of these focalizers, or with respect to the text: what characters occur in a story and how much room is given to each of them.

A second means of manipulation concerns the use of elements like time and sequence in a story, as well as how actors are transformed in story characters and their relationships in the context of specific, sometimes symbolic, places. The sequence of events may differ in fabula and story and so the storyteller is free to change the sequence. To give an example of how this works: it is a general misapprehension and thus a manipulative opportunity that the best or most important events are mentioned first. A particular use of time is what narratology calls an 'ellipse in story-time', which is not an ellipse in fabula-time. Ellipses are events that are not mentioned in the story although they do play a role in the fabula. They are often suggested to be implicit and obvious in the logic of cultural understanding. An example of this is when a story character falls pregnant while no information was given in the story about the conception. Ellipses may also appear later in the story (in case of the example, the actual conception could be revealed later) and in that way gain more importance. Jackson (1982) calls these ellipses subsidiary meaning (in contrast to focal meaning). It is idiosyncratic and less easily spelled out. This subsidiary meaning plays an important role in intercultural two-sided understanding since it links with underlying assumptions. As we shall see later, these underlying assumptions are important subjects to be discussed in order to create true mutual understanding.

Finally, a third means of manipulation is to tell a window narrative: a story in a story. The set of stories of *Thousand And One Nights*, told in the story of Sheherazade, is a typical example of a window narrative. The first narrative, the extradiegetic level (Rimmon-Kenan 1988) serves to explain, reinforce or justify the second diegetic level. If the extradiegetic teller is an important person, for example, the diegetic story may have more weight than if he is not. However, the extradiegetic teller may also cause an opposite effect when he/she is perceived to be less reliable. This may happen when the extradiegetic narator is too much involved in the diegetic story (this is called a homodiegetic storyteller), when his/her knowledge is limited or when his/her vision does not correspond to the acts and visions of the diegetic personages.

To get more insight in the way the information of the fabula is presented to the audience and how elements of the narrative influence this, Bal (1997) claims that it is helpful to compare different story versions. Comparing different versions shows which elements are important and which ones never change, etc. Related to this is the question: when is a version considered to be more (or less) significant? Although there is usually consensus between storyteller and audience on the importance of certain story elements people are sometimes

not aware of why some elements may be changed and others not (Bal, 1997). This confirms Bourdieu's idea that stories are related to subconscious dispositions (Pinxten, 1991).

In this section I have discussed some insights that may help to analyse stories. The principle of manipulation, in particular, may help to understand mechanisms of how stories influence the audience. I will come back to this in the course of the dissertation. In the next section I will discuss the last part of the main research question: the substance of the dialogue, environmental conservation.

2.5 The discourse on nature, local versus supra-local

After the theoretical discussion of the communication process and the instrument used for this process we now come to the third element: the subject about which we want to communicate. At first sight this subject may simply be nature conservation or environmental conservation. In practice, however, this subject needs more clarification. In order to come to such a complex subject it is important to understand what we mean by 'nature' or 'environment' that we want (or do not want) to conserve. Talking about 'nature' and the 'relationship between humans and nature' is a terminological choice, lacking more holistic and flexible terms. Yet, the concept of nature appears to be problematic when only discussed within a western academic context. Nature as a concept can have very different meanings. In some circles it is conceived as pristine nature, the wilderness, the pure and original, untouched by any human influence. This is particularly evident in the case of national parks, which are seen as pre-human remnants providing refuge from society. Arusha National Park in Tanzania is described as "a sense of a complete withdrawal from the world of man and of immersion in the peace of unspoilt nature" (Vesey-FitzGerald, 1967, p. 13, see Neumann, 1998, p.178). Partly unconsciously, this idea has influenced many western people in their admiration of what they call nature and their aim to conserve it. Many environmental organisations have used this concept, sometimes even in an erroneous context[8].

In a more biological sense nature can be seen as all organic life including humans. In a more evolutionary perspective nature is even broader including character, thoughts etc. Within this context we speak of acts of a person by saying: "he does so because it is his nature." In other contexts, nature can be seen as referring to all material reality. In that sense it is opposed to immaterial things like ideas and immaterial concepts including supernaturalism.

In this research I tend to focus on a concept of nature in contrast with culture or technology. Here nature includes everything that is not cultural, *i.e.* everything not made or organised by human volition. Here, nature can be defined as everything that organises itself, including human nature and nature outside the human body such as the weather and the sea.

[8] An example of incorrect use will be discussed in chapter 8.

Within the context of this study we could make a further distinction by using the term 'living nature' referring to everything outside the human body that organises itself and lives: plants and animals.

It should be noted, however, that indigenous visions often do not make the conceptualisation in which nature and culture are separated. The nature-culture dichotomy has its origin in western thinking, especially after the Enlightenment (Ingold, 1992). At the same time, this dichotomy forms the basis for so-called ecocentrism and the politics of all environmental movements, since it places mankind in an exceptional position, apart from nature, and in the position to influence nature. The idea of nature apart from people has led to many nature conservation practices in which they have tried to protect nature by isolating it from human influences. Yet, these practices have sometimes led to the opposite effect. Ghimire and Pimbert (1997, p.6) describe several examples in which the presence of certain large animal species is higher in areas modified by people. Moreover, the authors state (p.6) that what many conservationists still refer to as 'pristine' landscapes or 'untouched wilderness', are in fact mostly human cultural artefacts. Another example concerns the conservation of indigenous bee species in Mexico. These species have become highly marginalised after the introduction of the honeybee. The role of the Mayan tradition, based on traditional beekeeping turned out to be crucial for the conservation of the indigenous species (Zwaal, 1992). These examples at least put into question the practice of the idea of separating mankind and nature. It should be noted that by giving these examples I aim to counterbalance the nature-culture dichotomy, I do not aim to reject it. Moreover, practical objections of this dichotomy do not imply that it could be useful on an analytical level.

In contrast to dichotomic thinking there are a lot of alternative perceptions in the world in which for example, manifestations of man and nature are perceived as parts of a greater whole, a physical or meta-physical order (e.g. Bohm, 1980) or nature is considered to be 'the culture of the other side' (Schefold, 1988) or the boundary between human things and natural things is open and fluid (Zanen, 1996).

Apart from nature and culture there is a third component, called environment. Environment has become more central in Western debates in the last decades. Many former nature conservationist have shifted towards environmental conservation (see section 7.2.1). Apart from the supra-local level, also local actors in Western countries appear to make the difference between nature and environment. A research done by Aarts (1998) among farmers in a Dutch region 'de Peel' shows that they do make a distinction between nature and environment. For example by the statement: "I feel responsible for the environment but I do not so for nature." Apparently, they relate 'the environment' to their own activities such as the emission of ammonia, whereas for them 'nature' refers to a more general level, such as the forest or the swamps, that is considered to be the responsibility of the state.

The danger of an *a priori* division between nature and environment is indicated by many authors (Ingold, 1992; Milton, 1996; Cheney & Weston, 1999). According to these authors

organisms, including humans, do not exist without their environment. A physical place in the environment can have different significance depending on who is using it (Ingold, 1992). Ingold thus argues to replace the concept of nature, based on the perception of the physical world by a neutral outsider, by environment, *i.e.* the reality of the world in relation with the person that gives meaning to it. I will follow Ingold by preferring to use the concept of environment rather than nature. I will use this concept in its most general meaning: the environment is that which surrounds us (Milton, 1996)[9]. This may hopefully leave enough opportunities for alternative visions related to, for example, the relation between human and non-human components.

The relationship between human and environment in other cultures is studied by many different authors. To give one example, Bird-David (1992a and b) has described the relationship for hunter-gatherer societies who consider the environment as a giving environment.

It should be remarked again that it is dangerous to talk about a single indigenous conceptualisation (e.g. the conceptualisation of the hunter-gatherers). It presumes that the indigenous people are a homogeneous stereotype group. Von Benda-Beckmann (1997) describes the tricky alliance between environmental protection and the rights of indigenous people. She states that a general perception on the part of the donors stimulated by intermediary organisations, of homogeneity among communities poses a serious threat to participation. According to Von Benda-Beckman it is mainly the intermediary role of NGOs that puts emphasis on the position of indigenous peoples in a national and international setting. However, she continues, these NGOs often deal with indigenous elite that has other interests than the common people that belong to the same group.

Related to the concept of environment is the concept of environmental protection, which is, of course, strongly dominated and initiated by a western conviction that they know what is best for the future of the world. This is founded on many rational and irrational arguments. Many of these are supported by scientific results. Yet, there are also counter-currents that contest the myth of the all-knowing Westerner (e.g. Stott & Sullivan, 2000). In many of these contests, however, this myth is replaced by another myth: the ecological wisdom of indigenous peoples. This myth has played an important role in the environmental discourse and I will therefore discuss it in more detail here.

The myth of ecological wisdom is even used by western environmental organisations as an inspiration for their activities and the recruitment of donors. Examples of these are the speeches held by Indian chiefs, based on a stereotype image of people that live entirely in harmony with their environment. Indigenous peoples are honoured for their contribution to

[9] It should be noted that this meaning is different from that which is often implicit in supra-local terms such as environmental movement or environmental problem. In case of misunderstanding I will use less philosophical indications such as plants, animals or ecosystems, which I will here summarise as 'nature'.

the conservation of bio-diversity and their enormous knowledge of species that is relevant for, among others, the medical science (Von Benda-Beckmann, 1997).

The myth of ecological wisdom is not free of criticism. It should be first noted that it concerns here mainly people of the forest, whereas people from semi-arid regions are mostly associated with over exploitation. There is, of course, no justification for this. The images of a certain environment do not necessarily have any relation to the real impact people have on that environment.

Furthermore, Milton (1996) criticises the myth of ecological wisdom by pointing out that many environmental activities of indigenous peoples are not related at all to the wisdom of how to treat nature harmoniously. That does not necessarily mean that there do not exist societies that deal with their environment in a sustainable way, but according to Milton this does not mean that it is done intentionally. On the contrary, it concerns a favourable situation with regard to isolation, population density and limited access to technology. This makes a certain life style temporarily beneficial for the environment. However, as soon as there is technological development or new social and economic perspective there are very few indigenous societies that manage to develop a sustainable lifestyle (Persoon, 1991).

Von Benda-Beckmann (1997) points out the danger that the ecological wisdom myth has for the position of indigenous peoples themselves. She writes: *"It could well be that indigenous people will eventually only be protected - if protected at all- as long as they are considered of environmental value."*

The myth of the indigenous wisdom is based on the presumption that many of these cultures are conservative and static. These peoples are considered to stick to old tradition with fixed norms and values. This is, in fact, related to the same idea that stories are static and fixed, reflecting and confirming this tradition. As already pointed out in section 2.3, I do not support the approach of considering stories to be static and unchangeable in the same way as I do not consider people to be unchangeable. Ingold (1998) believes in an active involvement of people with their environment. That means that the world is not a static cultural construction. Instead of humans constructing the environment, Ingold introduces the term 'dwelling in the environment' meaning that 'persons endure through continuous discourse with their environment, thus mutual constitution of persons and environment in process."

It may be concluded from the previous discussion that it is tricky to draw the *a priori* conclusion that a positive form of human activities with respect to the environment is always supported by and based on ecological wisdom. This is very important for the study of stories related to the environment because it shows that what counts are not the concrete activities that people manifest on a certain moment in time but the underlying assumptions they use to justify their behaviour. Only these assumptions may or may not guarantee a sustainable way

of living with regard to the environment. In analysing stories in the context of this research one should thus especially search for these underlying assumptions.

The following concluding section further elaborates on these underlying assumptions.

2.6 Conclusion: key concepts for storytelling dialogue on nature protection

As may be concluded from the previous sections, stories can be considered as useful tools for understanding people's perception of reality and how they deal with that reality. Moreover, there is enough evidence to say that stories all over the world have always been dynamic educational tools. However, to use stories as a tool for a truly intercultural dialogue on environmental issues is not an easy task. One should make as sure as possible that the message is understood in the way it was meant by the sender. As we have seen, this often means that a message cannot be transformed into a story in a direct way, e.g. using animal characters if one wants to convey a message about animals, or simply discussing respect in a story if one wants to convey a message about respect. Stories are always part of a wider semantic network, embedded in cultural background. Moreover, attention should also be paid to setting and format of the story told, as well as the place and function stories play in the specific culture.

This holds especially for the second part of the research, *i.e.* telling supra-local stories to locals. One should avoid a too direct transformation of a western message into a story, however locally composed and inspired. Telling a story with a western vision (e.g. De Groot *et al.* 1995, to be further discussed in chapter 9) without knowing the semantic network in which the story will be embedded by the audience runs a serious risk of leading to politely hidden unbelief or, in the worst case, to more intercultural misunderstanding, confusion and hostility.

Therefore, the first and major part of this research will focus on listening to stories rather than telling them. As remarked before it may be dangerous for several reasons to interpret direct indications of environmentally sustainable activities in local stories as being based on ecological wisdom. Instead, it is better to look for underlying assumptions that form the basis of these activities. Milton (1996) was already mentioned as an opponent of the myth of ecological wisdom. According to Milton, people do not have a natural tendency to deal with their environment in a sustainable way although acts of ecological wisdom occur in different cultures in the world. The ecological myth is kept alive because of a fundamental hope on a way back to a ready-made solution. In practice, there are no such solutions and stories can never been seen as ready-made prescriptions for a sustainable interaction with the environment.

So what can we do in the initial phase of the process that will finally lead to improving the environmental dialogue, represented by this research? Probably nothing more than looking for key concepts that can act as reliable indications for how people deal with nature.

Understanding of people's positions towards these key concepts may help to solve some misunderstandings that now stand in the way of true dialogue. Milton (1996: p. 137-138) presents a number of questions that are important for how people think about the environment and the consequences this has for their behaviour. I will use these principles as a framework in my later analyses. They will be briefly discussed below.

Questions 1, 2 and 3 provide insights to the way people perceive their environment, their relations with the environment and the value of the environment. Question 4, 5 and 6 serve to give an indication to what extent people will accept environmentalist principles.

1) Where does the balance of power lie in human-environment relations?

Environmental conservation is based on the assumption that people can do something to avoid the negative changes in the environment. It is thus based on the idea that people can manage the environment. Yet, in many cultures the environment is supposed to consist of powers that overrule human power. The Dogon in Mali (Van Beek & Banga, 1992) have as a major opposition the human sphere (the village) and the wild nature (the bush). From the bush stems all wisdom, knowledge and life-giving force. Although one can use this life-giving force for managing, for instance, one's field, one can never manage the bush. The field is thus a transition zone between the village where the power is with the people, and the bush where the power is with nature.

Pool (1994), who has done research in South Cameroon, makes a distinction between personal and natural forces in the environment. The former can be easily influenced by people, e.g. by contacting your deceased ancestor or by performing a ceremony. On the other hand, if forces are considered to be natural this may lead to passive behaviour since one feels impotent to change the situation.

Changing the environment may, in many cases, be an unconscious process for the actor but it can also be based on intentional choices. Fairhead & Leach (1996a) show in their book '*Misreading the African landscape'* how local people believe they can change their environment, e.g. by planting trees. In this example the locals thus see the landscape as an outcome of a dynamic interaction with people. In many other cases, however, environmentally sound behaviour is not based on a conscious choice but rather coincidental. In many cases in Africa real nature is regarded as more powerful than people, hence not open to responsibility and management. Thus, it is important to make a distinction between people's behaviour and the underlying motivations for it.

2) How is the environment perceived?

Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky (1990, see Milton 1996) divide the perception in different categories by using the grid-group typology of Mary Douglas (see also Aarts, 1996, p. 38-39). Douglas uses two variables of social organisation: 'Grid' and 'Group'. 'Grid' refers to the extent to which activities of people are regulated by external prescriptions. The more

grid, the less life that is open to individual negotiation. 'Group' refers to the extent to which people experience a bounded social unit. The greater the incorporation, the more individual choice is subject to group determination. A combination of both determines the experience of certain fears and threats from the environment. It leads to the following categorisation of nature:

- Vulnerable (low grid, high group): nature is fragile and does not recover by itself,
- Robust within limits (high grid, high group): nature can recover to a certain extent but is not invulnerable,
- Robust (low grid, low group): nature can always recover by itself,
- Capricious (high grid, low group): nature is unpredictable and threatening.

Thus, the way the environment is perceived determines to what extent nature is supposed to recover by itself. In case there is consensus on the idea that the balance of power is on the side of humans (like in most western ideas), there are two different movements. One that believes that nature is robust (or robust within limits) and can deal with any consequence of the industrial revolution, and the other, among whom the environmentalists, who see nature as vulnerable, is unable to support all impact.

3) How is the environment valued: anthropocentic or eco-centric?

The anthropocentric view considers the environment to be valuable only as a function of human use. Within the anthropocentric visions Milton makes a distinction between so-called ecosystem people that rely heavily on natural resources of one sort versus biosphere people who have access to alternative sources. Naturally, the value contributed to the environment will be higher in case there is more dependency.

The eco-centric view considers the environment to have also an intrinsic value, apart from its benefits for people. The eco-centric vision forms the basis of many environmental concerns arguing that the environment is also a stakeholder, a party in the ongoing processes. Since nature is unable to speak for itself, environmentalists place themselves in the position of lawyer, representing its voice. In most non-western societies however, the anthropocentric vision is dominant (Milton, 1996). Here we see a strange contradiction: many environmentalists refer to indigenous thoughts whereas it is highly doubtful whether these thoughts are rooted in eco-centrism.

Combining 1, 2 en 3 gives a more complete idea of the position of humans and nature. This is reflected by Zweers (1991) in his five basic attitudes[10]: people as rulers over nature, people

[10] The basic attitudes of Zweers (1991) and De Groot (1992) are more than just combining the first three Milton questions. They also refer to specific metaphors, ideas about the cosmos, about voluntarism etc. For many studies they may be helpful. However, for this research it may be a disadvantage since many of the metaphors and ideas are coloured by Western (Jewish, Greek etc.) thinking. For this research it is better to use more neutral dimensions such as those presented by the Milton questions.

as managers of nature, people and nature as partners, people as participants in nature, people and nature being united.

4) How is moral responsibility allocated within the society?

Even when people understand and accept the importance of environmental conservation, it may still be difficult for them to take personal responsibility to foster environmental change. If one concludes that humans can influence the environment, there is still the question whether it is the responsibility of each individual or whether it can be devolved to a group or a politically higher person. Societies differ greatly in this respect. Is it one's duty to take personal action even if a problem is a more or less collective problem, or is that rather seen as a concern for higher-ups? Does one feel guilty if one withdraws from collective action, or rather only ashamed if exposed to the consequences? Details in stories reveal and determine much in this respect. Extended explanations, for example, may form an excuse for bad behaviour. In this way stories may be a mechanism to trade off problems (see e.g. Mandelbaum, 1993). Responsibility is often delegated to the government whereas the government may not act without powerful public demands.

5) How is the relationship between events and time understood: linear and irreversible, or as a cyclical pattern in a larger perspective of ups and downs?
and
6) Do people relate their own activities to that time scale?

Traditionally there has been a distinction between western culture supposedly having a linear time view (past-present-future) versus non-western cultures perceiving time as cyclic and repetitive (like the course of the seasons). However, this division has proven to be inadequate and many exceptions and intermediate positions exist (see Persoon & Van Est, 2000).
In oral literature we can find many stories related to time. Particularly myths dealing with the element of time. They go back to a certain fixed moment in the past from where the story starts. The past provides an explanation and even a justification for the present situation, such as the status of land rights and the use of natural resources. It may at the same time lead to a conservative attitude towards a certain situation.

As far as the future is concerned, it is often stated that local people in developing countries do not have much vision on it. This is of course important with regard to the will to invest or think about sustainable ways to deal with the environment. It should be directly remarked that this idea of future needs some specification. There appear to be two kinds of thinking about the future. I will illustrate this by using the distinction made by Ingold (1989 & 1996) between perception and interpretation. According to Ingold, much human behaviour is based on perception, *i.e.* the results of a direct interaction between people and their environment. In fact, the term perception could also be used to indicate the way animals deal

with their environment, making their strategies by trial and error. However, mankind distinguishes itself from an animal by being a designer, by being able to interpret the world and to give meaning to it. It should be noted that in practice there is an ongoing interaction between perception and interpretation, making the distinction merely theoretical. Related to the future we may make a similar distinction. On the level of perception, all people as well as all animals 'think' about future. This includes, for example, taking care of your offspring and the storage of food. These activities are formed by evolution; they are universal, highly individual and kin-oriented. On the level of interpretation, on the other hand, we enter into the domain of culture. It includes an active way of thinking about the future by imagining different scenarios. It refers to a more general group level that may even be in conflict with individual short-term interests. Obviously, it is also on this level that we deal with the future perspectives of environmental agencies. That is why this level of interpretation is extremely important for understanding the deeper motives behind behaviour of local people in Cameroon. Especially stories, as a key expression of culture, may help our insight into the level of interpretation of the future.

In terms of Milton's (1996) distinctions, confronting locals with ideas of environmental protection means confronting them with the underlying assumptions that nature is vulnerable, that power is at the side of humans, that nature has an intrinsic value and that time is a linear phenomenon. For a true dialogue, I think one should descend to the level of these assumptions. In the final analysis of the stories, both local as well as supra local, I will use Milton's six questions. Comparison of both cultures may hopefully uncover a number of underlying misunderstandings in communication and open the way for new themes of dialogue.

3 Research methodology

In this relatively short chapter I will discuss the methodology used in this research. I will do this by subsequently discussing three parts: the collection of local stories, the analysis of local stories and the design of new stories including the process of telling these stories to local people.

3.1 Data collection

The basic data of this research are of course the local stories. These stories were collected during different periods in different sites in Cameroon. After several general stays in the Far North province of Cameroon in the period 1993-1995, I carried out a first six-months fieldwork specifically dedicated to stories in November 1996 till May 1997 (see Zwaal, 1997). This research also mainly took place in the Far North province, in three different villages namely: Pété, Zina and Guividig (see map 3.1). This fieldwork provided a general insight into the realm of stories of the Far North province of Cameroon as well as a first preliminary idea about the importance of stories and storytelling for environmental conservation. Part of these results is included in this dissertation as well.

From October 1999 till March 2000 a second fieldwork period was carried out. During this fieldwork one month was spent in the Far North again, mainly in Petté and Mindif. In addition, five months were spent for comparative study in Central Province of Cameroon: mostly in the villages called Ndjolé and Nguila (or Ngila, see map 3.2).

At first sight, the choice of the villages may seem quite arbitrary and comprehensive. There is of course a danger of losing yourself in the complexity of comparing too many different parameters. After all, one may remark that stories cannot be understood without knowing the context of daily life in these villages, particularly for each ethnic group (like agricultural cycles, ceremonies etc.). This would thus strongly advocate an in-depth case study at a very limited number of sites.

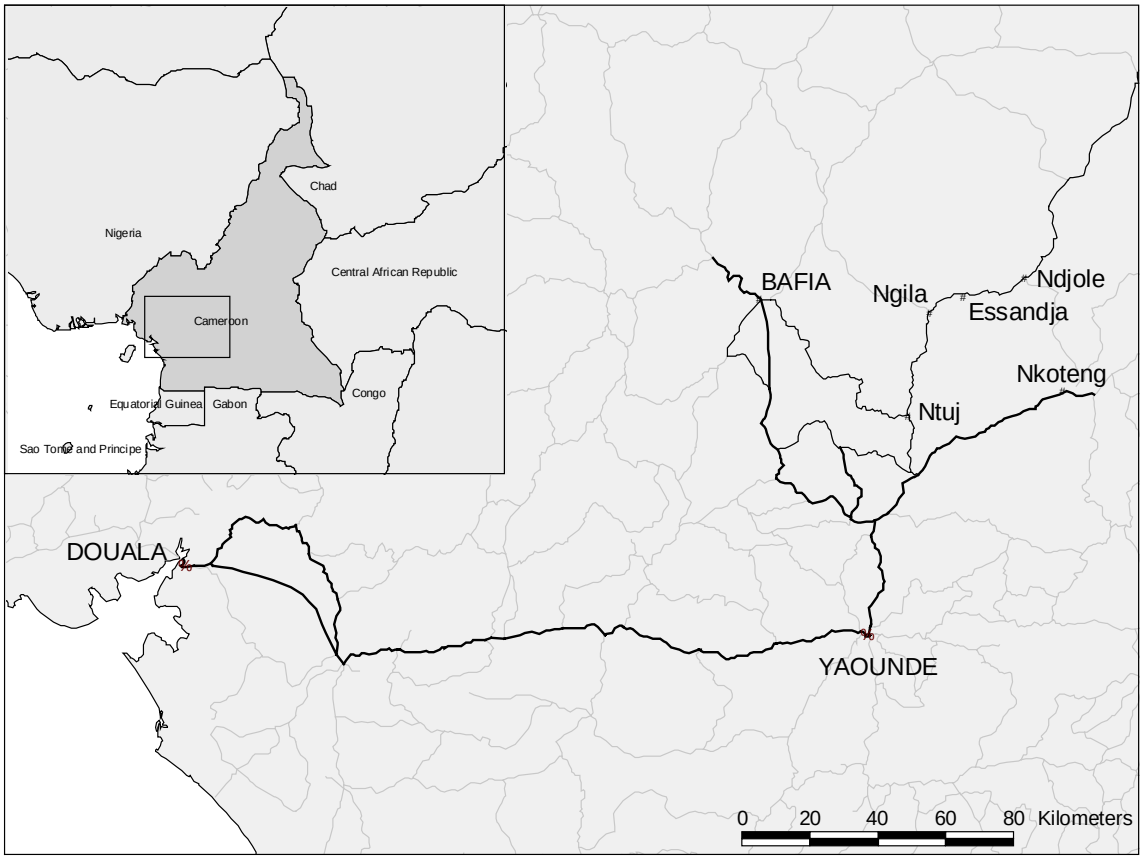
However, the prime aim of this dissertation is to focus on the more general instrumental application of stories rather than on a pure anthropological approach (see also pragmatic choices discussed in the chapter 1). Consequently, the research does not at all have the character of a case study with year-round observations in one village. The time spent in the villages was limited to the dry season only, for the simple practical reason that during this season people are less busy on the land and more willing to spend their time telling stories.

As we shall see, stories easily cross the border of a village and even of a whole region. To obtain a general insight into the story universe of Cameroon I thus presumed it to be more profitable to focus on a larger region than only on one or two villages. This may also provide possibilities for comparative data and thus for exploring different story versions or elements.

Map 3.1: the Far North of Cameroon

One can of course not understand stories without knowing the context in which these stories are told. Therefore the next chapter aims to provide some general background information about the fieldwork areas and its habitants. Interestingly, as we shall see in the next chapter, the inhabitants of the two different provinces -Far North and Central Cameroon- are historically more related than it seems when just looking at their geographical

position. Since it does not concern a detailed ethnographic case study, I will not go into much



Map 3.2: Central Province of Cameroon

detail with respect to the village level. Taking the limitations into consideration, I believe that the disadvantage of spreading out the focus over different areas is compensated by the enriching insights from the comparative data.

As has been mentioned in chapter 2, no specific research was done on alternative expression forms such as songs and riddles. I did collect about 300 proverbs, but analysis of these proverbs appeared not to contribute much to the research questions. This was especially due to the fact that for analysing these proverbs a very detailed knowledge of the language is required. For this reason, these narrating forms will not be very suitable for practical use in intercultural communication.

Collecting stories appeared to be an easy and a difficult task at the same time. Easy because everybody knows stories and is officially allowed to tell them. Difficult since it was difficult to get and select 'good' stories and 'good' storytellers. One has to select anyway since the number of stories is overwhelming. "*Innombrables sont les récits du monde*" said Roland Barthes. Yet the question remains how to select from the enormous set of potential

data. As explained in chapter 2, it is dangerous to simply limit the data-set to stories that deal with the environment in a literal way. Asking for specific stories in any case holds the danger that people may tell you just the things you want to hear without giving a realistic and reliable representation of their knowledge. To avoid this I used a method of working from a very general to a more specific level.

This method meant that I first spent some time in a village to get acquainted with the villagers and to collect random stories in random settings. I then made selections with regard to the type of stories I wanted to know more of. It often worked well to tell a story from earlier sessions and then ask for other stories. In practice this appeared to be the way local people themselves tell stories too: one story evokes another by the principle of association. Another stimulating device to elicit stories was by organising storytelling competitions in two villages. Everybody was allowed to tell one best story and a general jury was formed to decide who was the winner.

Apart from focussing on story types I also paid attention to different story formats, as well as the impact of different storytellers. To investigate the influence of the storyteller some particular sessions were held where gender and age were restricted to single groups.

In some cases people wanted me to pay them for telling stories. As will be discussed in 5.1, this is not a common habit in Cameroon. I therefore refused to pay them any money but I nevertheless tried to animate the sessions by bringing tea, sugar or other food. Especially in the Far North, men in particular like to chew cola-nuts while sitting together.

Finally, apart from the general collection of stories I used two other methods to enlarge the chance to find stories I would not have found spontaneously. These were *environmental mapping* and *transect walking.* For this, I was mainly inspired by Rapid Rural Appraisals (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA) (Chambers, 1994). These appraisals consist of a collection of different interrelated methods used to increase participation of the villagers in e.g. decision-making processes. Interestingly, storytelling itself has been one of these methods but in practice it has appeared to be too time consuming (De Wit & Van Est, 2000). Nevertheless, because of the link between storytelling and these participatory methods, some of these appeared to be extremely useful for collecting stories.

Environmental mapping is an activity for which several members are given a pencil and asked to draw a map of their village including the environment. The scale of the village as well as what details should be drawn are left to the creativity and insight of the villagers. While drawing people appear to indicate valuable places and landmarks. Difference in scale may show what is important to people. This is strongly related to stories, and simply asking people to tell something about what they were drawing often led to these stories.

Transect walking is the method of walking a straight route of a couple of hundred meters independent from any artificial path or framework. While walking, questions could be asked about the environment. It provides a different way of looking at the environment than just the conventional one, and may consequently lead to different stories about the environment.

While walking, one could cross specific landmarks, for instance a tree or a river, which then appears to have special meaning. As with environmental mapping, simply asking was often sufficient to evoke stories.

Various authors have inspired the idea of relationship between stories and the direct perceivable surroundings. An example is Kommers (1994) who introduces *mythical geography,* that investigates topographical notions in non-western societies. These notions appear to have a very narrative character. The central question in mythical geography therefore is: how has the environment been transformed into stories and what effects do these stories bring about? By using stories, one may put the focus on the meaning of perceptions, other than directly visual, that play a role in the disposition and use of the environment. According to Kommers, a narratological approach can help us to escape from oppositions generated by Western epistemology. Because of its attention to different perceptions and the mix between reality and fiction, a narrative culture assumes much unity between form and content, knowledge and imagination, geography and cosmology. In short: a unity of land, people and culture.

All stories were told in the language preferred by the storyteller. The stories were taped and later translated line by line into French with the aid of an interpreter. Due to the language barriers, the major part of stories in the Far North were collected in the main language: Fulfulde (also called Peul). However, since many people in the area are able to speak the Fulfulde language, apart from their mother tongue, the group was not limited to Fulbe storytellers. In Central Province, stories were collected among two distinct language groups: the Babouti and the Baveck, and narrated in their languages.

In this book, all stories are presented in English. It is a literal translation from the French version as translated and written down with the interpreter. Consequently, little attention is paid to the fine tuning of each story in the original language. This certainly is a limitation of this research. However, in the light of the aim of the research combined with the limited time available, a choice had to be made between investing time in local languages or putting more focus on the general praxis of stories. Especially because in this study stories are investigated in an international context, the handicap of language could be seen as an intrinsic part of the communication process. This does not mean that the local language should be completely denied. As all stories were recorded on a tape, particularities with regards to format, for example rhythm and rhyme, were noticed. Moreover, with respect to content, I checked questions and non-clarities by discussing these with the storyteller the next day. This especially concerned the occurrence of local terms that are not easily translatable into French. A typical example of this is the possible misunderstanding about the words used for forest, savannah and bush in Central Province (see section 6.5.2).

A final remark relating to the language concerns the gender of the animal characters. Whereas English tends to use the personal pronoun ‘it’ for animals, French always specifies

the gender of the animal, even in case this is not obvious from the context. In my translation I will follow the gender as indicated by the French translation by using 'he' or 'she'.

Of each story that was told a number of parameters were noted systematically. These include:

- Time and place of the session,
- Name, ethnic group, age, gender and profession of the storyteller,
- The number of people and other specific characteristics of the audience,
- General indication of the atmosphere and the intensity of interactions.

Moreover it was asked from whom the storyteller had heard the story and what according to him is the purpose of telling such stories.

Finally, about 300 stories were collected in the Far North, as well as 300 in Central Province. Since from some stories not all information was taken, or since they were not taped and transcribed literally, I finally used 241 stories from the Far North and 215 from Central Province for quantitative analyses (see chapter 5). Although one can never be sure whether this covers the whole realm of stories, it is supposed that this provides sufficient data to represent a valid sample of the total of existing stories.

Apart from collecting stories, open interviews were held with villagers to explain and to explore the stories or give more information about specific story elements.

This research does not include written literature since this genre is very little used in Cameroon. Besides, written literature should be considered as rather different from oral literature and in the light of the research questions written literature may be less suitable (see also section 2.3). In the theoretical considerations some attention was paid to the difference between oral and written literature. One exception to this are drawings like the ones made on posters sold everywhere in the markets in North Cameroon (see figure 6.1 and 6.2 in chapter 6).

3.2 Analysing method

Once one has collected almost 600 stories, the question of how to analyse them becomes paramount. Analysing took place mainly in the Netherlands. As with collecting the data, analysing was also done by starting out on a general level and then descending to a more specific one. This means that first a general categorisation of all stories was established related to format and content. Format includes, for example, the beginning and end of stories, style of narration etc. The content is related to, for instance, subject and type of characters in the story. In addition, general statements could be made for each story with respect to setting, such as age and gender of the storyteller.

Thus, the stories were systematically entered in an Excell database, including the following information:

- Setting: place, time, storyteller (name, age, gender, ethnic group),

- Format: type of story, beginning and end, particularities such as songs, moral (not) included,
- Content: characters in story, themes, landscape indications.

This database enabled me to generate general statements, for example about differences between the research areas or the correlation between certain parameters. However, it appeared to be very complicated to do a full-fledged statistical analysis for several reasons. First, because the sampling, *i.e*. the universe from which the stories were taken, was unknown and it was certainly not random. It is extremely difficult to collect stories in a random way especially because one story generally elicits another, and the chance is very high that all stories in one session have similar themes or story characters. The length of a storytelling session, ***i.e.*** the number of stories told thus consistently biases the number of occurrences of certain parameters. Second, knowledge of many parameters, such as the influence of the audience, is lacking which makes it impossible to generate statements about the mutual relationship of other parameters. Third, since stories were told in spontaneous situations, one could not change one parameter while keeping the other ones fixed. Therefore, it is not possible to apply simple statistical tests.

The question should thus be asked whether the exploration of sophisticated statistics would contribute much to the general aim of the research, as formulated in the research question. I presume not. For this reason, the quantitative analysis is limited to the general presentation of some of the data if useful for the discussion. This implies that the database does not say anything about the narratological universe as a whole, but instead it provides information about the characteristics and the correlation of the particular set of stories as collected.

After the general analyses of the stories, the next step has been to focus on the value of stories for the environmental dialogue. This meant, looking for the way in which on a deeper level stories are expressing knowledge and perceptions concerning the environment. Here we have to take into account the two levels of knowledge mentioned in section 2.2. The first 'informative' level refers to stories providing concrete information about the environment. This includes issues like which animals and plants occur in stories, what is told about the behaviour of these characters? What literal lesson or morals do stories have? The second 'conceptual' level refers to the different key concepts mentioned in section 2.6. This second level is, of course, the most difficult part. It refers to underlying assumptions, the 'unspoken issues', the subsidiary meaning. It means listening between the lines. For this, apart from the textual content of the story, the reaction of the audience is important as well as analyses of the additional interviews. It should be realised that one story may, of course, work on both levels at the same time. It could, for example, provide literal information about animals and

at the same time refer metaphorically to certain issues in the human world, having its impact on the audience's mentality.

3.3 Story design and experimentation

Story design and experimentation is probably the most precarious part of the research. As discussed in section 1.3, the design of stories holds many moral and practical dilemmas. For reasons explained there, the principal part of story design has been limited to a theoretical exploration. Nevertheless some experiments were done in the field, telling stories to a Cameroonian audience. As we can also see from the formulation of the last research question (see section 1.2.3), the methodology used for these experiments is largely based on the results of the preceding research on stories. Therefore it will be discussed after presenting these results, hence in Chapter 9. I will limit myself to some general remarks here.

All these experiments have been done in natural settings as they were found during the story collecting sessions. Furthermore, experiments were done in the same fieldwork areas as I did the collection, largely in the same villages. As with listening, telling was never done in a line-by-line way (as did De Groot *et al.*, 1995) since this could seriously limit the possibility of expression of the storyteller.

In order to get some inspiration for composing new stories, exercises were done in the villages. A sort of game was played in which a new story was composed by two to eight people including myself. Everybody in his turn was allowed to say one line to follow up on the previous one. The time was limited to five minutes in which one had to finish a logical sequence of events. The story was taped on a recorder and played afterwards in the presence of the audience. Furthermore, to get more insight into the difference between the meaning of the teller and the interpretation of the listener some experiments were done with telling a story and asking the audience to retell the same story at different time intervals (directly afterwards, the following day, some weeks later).

The stories that were finally composed were told by the researcher to the interpreter and then by the interpreter to the audience to be sure the language was as appropriate as possible and to limit the potential influence of a white storyteller. To achieve this I first had some isolated sessions with the interpreter, telling him my story and making sure he understood it well. At the same time, these sessions provided an opportunity for the storyteller to improve the stories.

Sessions were organised in the villages. During and after telling the story in the village, the reaction of the audience was registered as well as the answer to the questions that were posed.

I would like to point out here that there is, of course, no fixed standard method for telling stories for intercultural communication. All methods mentioned, both theoretically as well as practically, should be considered as suggestions to be further explored.

4 The research areas: the Far North and Central Province

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to give some general background information about the context and setting in which the present study was carried out. Since this research covers two relatively large research areas it is impossible to give detailed information about all sites[1]. Instead, in this chapter general information is given about Cameroon with a specific focus on the two research areas. It is meant especially for readers who are not experts of Cameroon. In the following chapters of this book this information will act as a reference for a better understanding of the stories collected as well as of the process of storytelling[2].

Cameroon is often called the miniature of Africa since it includes a wide variety of natural and cultural settings. There are 16 million people in Cameroon belonging to over 250 different ethnic groups. Apart from the different languages spoken by these groups, the *lingua franca* is French with the exception of the two Western provinces that are Anglophone.

The distance between the two research regions, Central Province (measured from Bafia) and the Far North (measured from Maroua) is about 1250 km. Because of Cameroon's variation this naturally leads to very different social and natural settings. Central Province, for example, has a higher population density than the Far North. It is the political centre of the country, including the capital city Yaounde, whereas the Far North is relatively isolated and undergoes much influence from the neighbouring countries.

For a study on stories about the environment it is important to know the natural environment people deal with in daily life. The next section gives information about the natural environments of Cameroon. Furthermore, it is important to know the general social contexts in which the stories are told. These will be discussed in the remaining sections. Although both research areas are very distinct, there also appears to be a link when going into the history. Furthermore, some general ethnographic issues will be discussed briefly such as religion, livelihood strategies and politics.

4.2 Ecology

Cameroon is situated at the southern frontline of the Sahel. This means that the Far North of Cameroon is characterised a landscape forming the transition zone between Sudan and Sahel savannahs. Crossing the country from north to south, rainfall increases and the vegetation becomes denser. We finally end up in tropical rainforest. The Western part of the country is

[1] As explained in chapter 1, the intention has never been to carry out a detailed ethnographic study on stories.
[2] Here, the assumption is that the natural environment, being the subject of the intercultural dialogue, is linked to economic, political and spiritual matters.

hillier and has the characteristics of a more moderate climate zone, including grass savannahs and moderate forest.

The country has more or less the shape of a triangle. In the Far North the distance from the eastern to the western border becomes very small. The borders finally merge in Lake Chad. The eastern border with Chad is marked by the Logone river that annually floods at the end of the dry season. The river originates in the Adamoua and flows northwards to Lake Chad. In the Far North, the Western border is marked by hills that form the border with Nigeria.

Ecology of the Far North

There are two parts of the Far North province that are most relevant to the present study (see map 3.1). First, the Waza park and its adjacent areas of the Logone floodplain and higher land, with the research villages Niwadji, Pette and Zina. Second, the Diamaré plain south of Waza with the research villages Mindif and Moutourwa. The Far North has a rainy season from June to September with a mean annual rainfall ranging from 550mm to 750 mm and with fluctuations over the years of up to 50 % (Beauvilain, 1995). In addition, the annual floods of the Logone river, during August to November, are of vital importance for the fertility of the floodplain in the Far North province. Vegetation in this area is dependent on these floods. In 1979, however, a dam was built for irrigation of rice paddles, forming Lake Maga, and an embankment along the Logone river. This was the beginning of a serious sequence of problems leading to drought in the upper reaches of the river covering an area of about 1800 km² (Drijver & Marchand, 1985; Scholte *et al.,*1996). This was certainly aggravated by a lower than average rainfall in the eighties. The change in soil fertility led to a change in natural vegetation of the floodplain, especially the replacement of perennial grasses such as *Echinochloa pyramidalis* and *Oryza longistaminata* by annual species, especially *Sorghum arundunaceum.* The decrease in soil fertility led to a decrease of natural resources that resulted in, among others, population exodus.

The landscape in the higher areas around Waza and in the Diameré looks like a typical Sahelian landscape: little villages surrounded by fields are alternated by brousse, which is dominated by *Acacia seyal* shrublands.

The building of the dam was not the only radical human intervention. In and around Waza National Park, the Far North has a rich variety of wildlife including elephants, antelopes and lions. Annex 1 shows the occurring mammals and their Latin names. Because of this unique amount of wildlife including the last big elephant population of West Africa, the French colonialists decided to create a hunting reserve in 1934 that was turned into Waza National Park by the government of Cameroon in 1968. In 1982 it officially became a biosphere reserve. As mentioned above, the research area in the Far North is situated south and southeast of Waza National Park. The creation of a national park led to the increase in population of certain wildlife species, such as elephants, that have partly come from Chad.

Especially because of its unique population of wildlife the park has attracted many researchers and tourists. At the same time, however, it has disadvantaged the local population by limiting them in their access to resources. In addition, the local people living around the park suffer from serious damage caused by wildlife that migrates out of the park every year. This includes damage to field crops by elephants and monkeys as well as livestock killed by lions. Damage caused by elephants is not limited to the boundary of the national Park. Elephants appear to migrate to an area 200 km south of Waza in the rainy season (Tchamba, 1996). Especially the research village of Mindif, situated in the Diamaré plain about 150 km south of the park, suffers regularly from serious crop damage. The problems local people encounter are enlarged by the decrease of soil fertility and water in the area partly due to the building of the dam. In practice this means that both people and wildlife have to compete for the same space and resources.

Besides the general ecology of the Far North, mythical geography, discussed in section 3.1 emphasises the importance of directly perceivable surroundings. Landmarks especially could be expected to play a role in stories. The flat landscape of the research area is broken by occasional granite inselbergs. The most prominent one is the *Dent de Mindif,* located at one of the research villages called Mindif. This typical twin peak is even visible from Maroua, about 30 km away, and is thus a remarkable feature in the landscape.

Ecology of Central Province

In Central Province there is a short rainy season from September to November and a long rainy season from March to June. Total precipitation in this province is between 1400 and 1600 mm/year. Going north from the capital Yaounde, the landscape turns into a typical transition zone between savannah and tropical forest, forming a mosaic of both vegetation types. Forest patches are alternated by savannah, and areas of cultivated land and clear-cut forest. About 100 km north of Yaounde one has to cross the Sanaga river, a huge river flowing eastwards ending up in the sea north of Douala. There are two main bridges. Taking the west road after crossing the Sanaga the landscape turns abruptly into plain savannah. Taking the east road to Yoko, along which the research villages are situated[3], this change is not visible.

The variation in landscape offers an interesting base for different stories. As we shall see further in this dissertation, environmental NGOs and local people interpret the landscape in different ways, including the explanation for the difference between the landscape change after crossing the Sanaga on the two roads.

[3] The villages are situated at 120 (Ndjolé), 134 (Essandja) and 160 km (Nguila) from Yaounde.

Nowadays, there is no big game left[4] in the region, except perhaps some monkey species and smaller mammals such as duikers and, according to some villagers, buffaloes. Smaller animals like hares, squirrels, boars and hedgehogs, on the other hand, do occur abundantly. In contrast to the Far North there are no protected areas, reserves or national parks, in the research area. There is little interest shown by environmental NGOs in this part of Central Province, probably because it is part of the urbanised region including the capital city. The closest national reserve is the Dja reserve, about 250 km south-east of Bafia and the reserve de Pangar et Djérem, about 200 km east of Bafia. Although there is not much information available, the influence of these reserves on the research area is presumed to be negligible.

As we have seen the two research areas are very distinct, both with respect to the environment as well as with respect to the human intervention in the environment. The differences between the two research areas can be useful for tracing the potential link between stories and the environment since one may expect to find regional specific stories that deal with the characteristics of the environment.

4.3 Ethnic groups and the history of their migration

4.3.1 Overview of ethnic groups

As already mentioned in the introduction, Cameroon consists of a large variety of ethnic groups. Consequently the people I worked with belong to many different ethnic groups. These groups have been mixed and (re)formed by a long history of migration. In the light of the thesis it is impossible and too far-reaching to go into the details of this history. This section will only give a general idea related to the regions and ethnic groups with whom I worked.

Ethnic groups in the Far North

The Far North Province has been inhabited by various ethnic groups with different backgrounds. Converting from the fourteenth century onwards, three major Islamic empires have influenced the historical events and migration flow in the area: from 1200-1700 the Mandara sultan wielded the sceptre at the region at the northern foot of the Mandara mountains (with Mora as a capital), while further north the even more important Bornu empire (in which the town of Magari was most important) contributed to the wealth in the area. Further south, Fulbe pastoralists had migrated to the area in search for pastures and had to pay tribute and submit themselves to local rulers (Van Santen, 2000). They thus were ready to support Fulbe invaders who, from 1800 onwards, as part of the large Sokoto empire

[4] From documents such as the report of Curt von Morgen (1971), as well as stories from elders in the village, it has become clear that at the beginning of the 20th century there were large mammals including elephants and lions in the area.

in northern Nigeria, slowly submitted the Diamara region and its acephalous ethnic groups like the Tupuri and Massa, while fighting for power with hierarchically organised populations like the Mundang (Schilder 1994; Van Santen & Schilder, 1994).

In popular memory the Sao civilisation – people who from the ninth century onwards lived scattered in autonomous villages south of Lake Chad- is considered to be the base of the Kotoko, the fishing population of the river Logone area. However, they are most probably also the ancestors of many other populations. Later, other groups like the Arab Choa (17th and 18th century) and the Mousgoum invaded the area (Lebeuf 1980: 207 in Molenaar & Van Santen in press.). Especially the Mousgoum occupied the economic niches (Van Est, 1999).

The French colonial system used the hierarchically organised empires of northern Cameroon to reign local populations (Beauvilain, 1989). Consequently, for a very long time local Muslim rulers were able to hold on to their power, thereby submitting the non-Muslim groups who were called *Kirdi,* that by the influence of Christian converters turned into a honourable nickname (Schilder, 1994).

Nowadays several streams of non-local influences more or less compete with each other. One is the transnational influence of the Islam, which predominated until recently. Another is the more Western-oriented flow of ideas and projects that non-Islamic migrants bring when they come back from the cities. Further external factors, of which the installation of the SEMRY rice project is the main one, influenced the dynamics of ethnic groups (Van Est, 1999). This project caused an influx to the Waza Logone area of people from outside. On the other hand, the construction of the dam has led to a reduction of possibilities for fishing and thus an exodus of people. As a consequence, ethnic groups that depend on fishing such as Kotoko (who by the way do not appreciate rice at all) and Mousgoum have further migrated to the north as well as to the artificial lakes in the south.

Of the different research villages, the biggest one is Pette which consists of about 38 quarters with about 8800 inhabitants. It is situated about 25 km south of Waza national Park. It is the main village of the district in which also the smaller village Fadare (about 4500 inhabitants) is situated. Pette is especially important for the region because there is a large regional hospital managed by a European lady. In Pette as well as Fadare, Fulbe are dominating in the centre, whereas in the quarters there are other ethnic groups, mainly Tupuri. Mindif is also a Fulbe village, consisting of about 7000 inhabitants. It is situated only 25 km. east of Maroua and consequently undergoes a lot of influence from the town. Apart from Pette and Mindif, additional research was carried out in other villages among which Guividig (2500 inhabitants) situated at the border of the Maga Lake, and Zina (1500 inhabitants) situated in the floodplain on the banks of a small river: the Logo Matya.

Ethnic groups in Central Province

The ethnic groups of Central Province among which I did research were the Babouti and the Baveck. Both groups originally come from the North of Cameroon, from the Adamaoua province, the region between Ngaoundere and Tibati. According to general history as it is taught in primary schools in Cameroon, the Baveck were the first to migrate southwards. Later, in the second half of the nineteenth century, they were pushed further and further to the south by the more dominant Babouti who in turn were chased by the islamisation of the Fulbe. This finally resulted in a line of villages along the only road directly connecting the north of Cameroon with Central Province (see map 3.2). Going southwards along this road from Yoko to Ntui we encounter villages inhabited by Babouti as well as Baveck. Babouti are living mainly between Yoko and the research village Ndjolé. Baveck are living more to the south in the region reaching from Ndjolé southwards to the village of Ntui. One exception is my research village Nguila that is mainly inhabited by Babouti whereas all surrounding villages are Baveck. Apart from Babouti, there is a minority of Baveck and Haussa in Nguila.

As will be further explained in the next section, the historical migration pattern explains why up until today most Babouti (including those living in Nguila) are Muslim whereas the Baveck are mostly Christians. Apart from this there are many differences between both groups. In Central Province Baveck are generally seen in a more positive way than Babouti. They are often called: 'they who see', whereas Babouti are called: 'they who cover', *i.e.* 'they who are hypocrites'.

4.3.2 Migration to and settlement in Central Province

The move of the Babouti and Baveck is part of a larger collection of groups that migrated to the south until encountering the Sanaga river. This migration took place about 300 to 600 years ago due to the islamisation by the Fulbe. The Sanaga river plays an important role in roughly marking the difference between two important sets of ethnic groups. It geographically forms the borderline between Moslim and Christian traditions.

According to a legend[5], the crossing of the Sanaga took place on the back of a huge snake, called Ngang-Medja, which was woken up by a big warrior. The snake formed a bridge so that all people from different ethnic groups could cross. Suddenly one of the chiefs hit the snake with his stick. The snake rolled up and disappeared. Those people who had not already crossed were now forced to stay on the northern side of the river and finally became islamized. Among these were the Sanaga, Babouti and Bafia. The ethnic groups that managed to cross the Sanaga river and escape from the influence of islam are indicated by a

[5] This legend is commonly known by everybody in Cameroon. It is told in many different versions. Especially concerning the ethnic groups that have or have not crossed there is confusion. The story may be told in a specific version to underline the status of a specific ethnic group.

collective noun: the Beti or Bantou. There are different stories about the history of this migration in which different ethnic groups are mentioned. The Bantou group existed of among others Fang, Bulu, Ewondo, Eton and Baveck, the latter being one of the ethnic groups of this research.

The name 'Sanaga' was given by the Germans. According to an informant the Germans met the people living by the river and asked them what they called the place. The locals answered: "*o sodjo nange la me dje"*, which means: "*this is the river, there are the houses*." The Germans mixed the words *o sa nanga*. This has changed into Sanaga. Later on, when the Germans had built the two bridges, many people returned to the north and mixed again with the groups that had never crossed the Sanaga.

Apart from this story about the migration in general there is some specific information about the research villages. About the village of Nguila, more specifically, a villager told me:

"Our grand parents have come from Sudan. They arrived in Yoko and called the place: Yo-tdje-ko. They continued and arrived in Matsjari. The chief of Matsjari has stayed there. The chief of Linté had entered in a forest over there. During that time the chief of Nyone went down towards the south and entered Yamyare and arrived in a village called Batare. He left his brother there, who became the chief. Then they went down to Ngomdong. They wanted to fight against the Yakaba tribe in the south. This is when they crossed the Sanaga river with the help of a snake. There were many of them. That is how they arrived in Yakaba. Later the Bafia followed the river Nbam. The Voute (or Babouti) followed the river Sanaga. There were two superior chiefs: Ngurte, founder of the Linte in the West, and Ndumba or Ngrang founded Nguila in the East."

Because of their turbulent history many stories told by Babouti and Baveck are related to war and conquests[6]. Nguila has played a specific role in history since this was also the place where the local people on their way southwards met the Germans, who came from the coast on their way northwards. In his book *à travers le Cameroun* one of the first German inquisitors Curt von Morgen (1893, re-edited in 1971) describes his stay in Nguila from 1889 until 1891. He writes (p. 54):

"I have learned from Nguila (the name of the chief) that the Babouti have migrated from the north and they have occupied their present territory only for ten years."

The first habitants of Nguila settled on a mountain so they could protect the village by having a good view of the approaching enemy. The mountain was called Ndoeba and the village Ndoeba Tsom. Von Morgen describes: *"the 800-1000 houses are carefully protected*

[6] This is a common phenomenon in oral history.

against enemies because all around as well as on the advanced forts there are guards of Nguila."

In 1917 the villagers came down to establish the present village that got the name Nguila[7]. The founder of Nguila and all the ancestors were buried on the mountain. Until today, there is an annual ceremony at the beginning of the dry season in Nguila during which all graves are cleaned and food is offered to the ancestors. During the course of the year the place is accessible only to native inhabitants from Nguila. Strangers that go up the mountain are believed to get lost. They are warned that they will never return again.

The meaning of the hill for the inhabitants of Nguila is expressed in many stories. It is an example of how specific elements in the environment are framed. I will, of course, return to these stories in more detail in the next chapters but the following quotation will illustrate the relation between the mountain and the value of other elements in the environment:

On the mountain there are the graves of our ancestors. We go and clean them every year. When the white men came they looked with their modern apparatus. They said: "you have very good wood here, it can make a lot of money but you just don't realise it." But they don't know that there is a magical type of wood there, a black one. You cannot go there, the magic ensures that you get lost. Up on the mountain there are the chiefs who died during the war. After the war we went there. They were buried here, even the princesses who had died elsewhere. People know where they belong because you can hear the tamtam on the graves. You can hear it, but you won't see anything. The sound is also a warning that an important person of the village may die. Cleaning the graves cannot be done by just anyone, only by the original habitants of the village. A stranger cannot go there. If you go walking, you will get lost. During the year nobody is allowed to go there. There are a lot of animals there but it is forbidden to hunt them. When the white men want to fell trees there they have to ask permission from the chief, until now there is no road going there.

In the second research site, Ndjolé, there are also many stories related to battle. The village is named after a tree that was used as a hiding place during the war. The last fight between Fulbe and Baveck took place on a hill called Eloke, that was also used as a hiding place (see map of the village, annex 2). Some days after the last fight, the Germans arrived and decapitated their chief Ambara. His head was put next to the old cemetery, and on that spot a mango tree started to grow. Some years later his head was taken to Yoko. On that same spot another mango tree started growing. It is forbidden to touch these trees. Villagers warn you that if you eat the mangoes you will get leprosy.

It should be noted that since Babouti and Baveck originate from the north they are both savannah people. Although dealing with a mosaic environment now, they share a lot of customs with people from the North. This includes their land-use systems but also their broad

[7] Nguila means holy forest.

religious background, which as in many cultures, includes many animistic elements. Abega (pers.comm.) has done extensive research among a related group in Central Province. He has found, for example, that in the last decades these savannah people have approached other ethnic groups that are originally from Central Province to get advice on how to deal with the forest spirits that they had apparently never encountered before. More will be said about the spiritual aspects of Cameroon in section 4.6.

4.4 Economic contexts and livelihoods

4.4.1 Land use in the Far North

In the Far North different ethnic groups originally have different occupations. Although most people rely on a mixture of agriculture, pastoralism, and (near water) fishery, some groups are clearly dedicated to one of these métiers, often forming part of their ethnic identity. As has been explained above, the most dominant ethnic group in the Far North is the Fulbe. These are originally cattle pastoralists, and almost all Fulbe possess cattle. Fulbe can be divided into two groups: nomads and (semi-) sedentary groups. The latter are also mainly farmers. Nomadic Fulbe use the *yaere,* the floodplain of the Logone, as their grazing area during the dry season, and in the wet season they migrate southwards. There are many different nomadic groups with different routes, but generally the research village Pette is the settlement base for the northern transhumant pastoralists while the other research village, Mindif, is the settlement base for the southern transhumant pastoralists (Scholte, *et al.* 1996.). The Fulbe are not the only nomadic pastoralists. There are also Arab-choa, often possessing larger herds.

Sedentary Fulbe often practise cattle breeding and agriculture in a mixed production system (Van den Berg, 1997, p.83). They do not leave the village for extensive travels. Instead, cattle graze in the bush around the village while guarded by a shared herdsman. In addition, Fulbe feed the cattle with crop residues, such as cotton cakes (Zuiderwijk, 1998, p.158). Some send their cattle on transhumance with the nomadic herders.

Everywhere in the Far North province land is cultivated. The most important crop is millet but people also cultivate peanuts, beans, gombo. Millet is the main food crop of which there are several varieties. The most important one, especially preferred by the Fulbe population, is *mouskouari,* transplanted sorghum, cultivated in the dry season on the heavy clay soils that retain much water from the wet season. The crop is sown in nurseries during the rainy seasons and transplanted at the beginning of the dry season. It is harvested in February. Furthermore, there is rain-fed sorghum, or locally called *mil rouge,* preferred by *Kirdi* groups such as the Tupuri, used for making *bil-bil,* a popular fermented drink. It is cultivated on the alluvial sandy soils.

Going northeast, into the floodplain, fishery becomes more important. Especially among the sedentary Kotoko who are typical fishermen. Apart from the Kotoko, the more

opportunistic Mousgoum also fish but they are agriculturists as well, especially in the rainy season.

This rough division in ethnic groups does not at all mean that environmental use is clearly divided in niches. Quite the contrary, it is the result of mutual competition and power balances (Van Est, 1999). The various activities of the different ethnic groups have certainly led to conflicts, especially because the land has become scarcer as a result of the drought and increase of population due to immigration. The most obvious conflicts are probably those between the Kotoko and the Mousgoum (Van Est, 1999), Kotoko and Arab Choa (Socpa, 1999) and those between Fulbe nomads and sedentary cultivators (Van der Ploeg, 2001).

As has been mentioned before, the Far North has long been relatively isolated from external influences. But the economic situation in the Far North has considerably changed in the last decades. This is mainly caused by the rise of the market economy and the introduction of internationally designed projects. Many of these projects were supported by the Cameroon government that see this as an opportunity to increase its power in the area. The three most important projects are the Cotton industry, the SEMRY rice project and the creation of Waza National Park.

Cotton has become more and more important as a cash crop especially after the establishment of the cotton industry SODECOTON in 1974 (Zuiderwijk, 1998). SODECOTON is a joint venture of the Cameroonian state with the *Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Fibres Textiles,* that had started the industrial cultivation in the area in 1951. SODECOTON does not grow the cotton itself but supports farmers (e.g. with fertilisers and fixed prices) to become outgrowers for the mill in Maroua. At present, most farmers in the research area plant cotton on an average surface of half a hectare. The expansion of cotton fields has led to increased land scarcity and land competition (Van den Berg, 1997). Although production has decreased in recent years, due to, among others, mismanagement and soil degradation (Zuiderwijk, 1998, p 156-160) it is still the most important money generator for farmers in the Far North. The cotton industry has had considerable influence on local economies if only because it has led to modernisation through credits, external inputs, seeds, machinery and draught animals and new technologies (Zuiderwijk, 1998).

The SEMRY rice project was initially pretentious because it was supposed to create a lot of work in the area. The irrigation project initially got a lot of world wide political support and was meant to introduce the cultivation of rice in the area. However, it has become clear that rice is important for political and traditional leaders and for merchants but not so much for local people who were not interested in rice and perceived working for SEMRY as a final option. Consequently, people moved because of the lack of good fishing and cultivation grounds. Moreover, it became very difficult to maintain specialisation in land use, leading to the mixing up of activities and increase in conflicts (Van Est, 1999, p.33-34). Thus, although

SEMRY did not satisfy the initial expectations, it did have a lot of influence on the local economy.

The creation of Waza National Park in 1986 was a third major heritage of the French colonial hegemony. First of all, the creation of this park caused the displacement of many households as well as the reduction of living area and access to natural resources. Second, as has already been indicated in section 4.2, the creation of the park has had severe influence on the local ecology, particularly the presence of animals that migrate out of the park regularly and cause severe damage to crops and cattle. Third, the Waza park provides (or pretends to do so) new jobs for local people, especially those who are living in the villages south of the park. This includes jobs like park warden or tour guide. Because of the park there is a slight increase in tourism from which surrounding villages receive some profits. The importance of this factor, however, is very marginal.

Cotton is the only cash crop in the Far North. Only about two per cent of the cotton-growers (which form 10 percent of the Cameroonian population) cultivate more than two ha and consequently realise net annual revenues of 280, 000 CFA (US $ 500) (Zuiderwijk, 1998, p.159). In addition, the area regularly suffers from drought, especially after the building of the Maga dam that has negatively influenced the hydrology of the area. Consequently, people have very minimum incomes, and do in general not have luxury goods, such as television. As a result, storytelling is a welcome activity for the long evenings.

As a result of the difficulties in the Far North, there has continuously been a high intervention of non-governmental organisations, including those who have an interest in environmental affairs like WWF, IUCN and SNV. In 1992 the Waza Logone project started, based in Maroua, with one of its aims to restore the floodplain. In May 1994 a pilot reflooding project started with the opening of a watercourse, formerly closed by the embankment of the Logone river. Because of these interventions, local people in the research area are very much used to the visits of a large variety of researchers and project assistants in their village. Most villagers have already participated in interviews and group sessions.

4.4.2 Land use in Central Province

In the research area of Central Province the two major traditional activities are hunting and agriculture. In addition, fishing is practised in the Sanaga river, and in small water courses near the villages. Hunting continues during the whole year in spite of hunting law made by the Ministry of Environment and Forest, which only allows hunting between April and June. In the last decade, hunting techniques have considerably changed as a result of the improvement of the road and the contact with Yaounde. Access to modern weapons has made the use of more traditional methods such as fire setting redundant. As a result, almost all heads of a family have at least one gun. While in former times hunting was meant for subsistence, nowadays there is a commercial interest. In Yaounde and elsewhere in the south

of Cameroon there is a lively bushmeat market and villagers sometimes work for merchants in Yaounde who then lend their guns to them.

Almost all villagers practise agriculture. Because of the high rainfall there are much more crops and varieties that can be cultivated than in the Far North. The most important food crops are yam (mainly cultivated by women), maize and potatoes. In former times millet was cultivated (Abega, pers. comm.). Around Nguila and Ndjolé the system of multi-crop rotation is used. New fields are cleared by slash-and-burn. The most important cash crop is cacao that was introduced in 1920.

As in the Far North, there is external intervention in the area. Since 1969 a French logging company has been operating in the research village of Nguila. In 1974 it moved to the neighbouring village of Essandja exploiting an area from Essandja to Ndanga. It came back to Nguila in 1997, using the name SOVACAM.[8] The originally Lebanese local director Miguel is well known to everyone in Nguila[9]. In spite of much backbiting, Miguel is largely respected by the villagers, mainly because SOVACAM provides work for about sixty people from the neighbourhood of Nguila and thus creates a major source of income. Moreover, the presence of a logging company guarantees the accessibility of the village since it maintains the roads for the transportation of wood.[10] They not only open formerly inaccessible areas, they also provide a continuous mean of transport. In Nguila, the trucks of SOVACAM are often used for transportation of people and goods.

Since people from Nguila travel to Yaounde regularly, there is a lot of influence from the capital, such as the import of luxury articles and the use of the French language. Nguila has an electricity connection, and there are a couple of televisions in the village. Ndjolé, which is much smaller and further away, has no electricity. There is a lot of trade between villages and the capital, especially since Nguila and Ndjolé are on the main road to the North. In the rainy season, however, this road becomes practically impassable, particularly the part between Nguila and Yoko. This means that people in Nguila are especially used to outsiders, whereas Ndjolé is more remote, also culturally.

As we have seen, both research areas are used to intervention from outsiders. It should be remarked, however, that in Central Province this intervention concerns mainly practices that have a negative influence on the environment, such as commercial hunting and logging. This contrasts with the situation in the Far North that has recently been confronted with many projects from environmental NGOs. Consequently, people in the Far North are more

[8] During my last visit in December 2001, the situation had changed slightly. Although the time was too short to do research on the new situation, the most important change was that logging activities had been expanded to the north and now again covered the area of Essandja.

[9] A detail is that he is married to the chief's sister-in-law but, as is commonly known, does not want to have children. Many villagers believe he is only married to guarantee his good position in the village.

[10] This also explains why logging companies are accessory to the increase of the trade in bushmeat.

accustomed to giving interviews and talking with researchers about the issue of environmental conservation. It may be interesting to see whether the different external interventions influence the stories told in the different regions. This could be done, for example, by comparing different story versions and by looking for story elements that are not authentic to that region.

4.5 Political context

One cannot understand the economic situation of the people in Cameroon without taking into consideration the political contexts. After all, politics determine who has access to certain resources and who has not. Environmental problems, such as degradation of land or water, are often strongly related to entitlements of people to be able to use natural resources (Leach, Mearns & Scoones, 1997). As has been mentioned above, different ethnic groups and land use practices can lead to severe conflicts in an area, especially when land is scarce as in the Far North. Several authors have stated that environmental degradation and resource conflicts are mutually influencing each other (e.g. Noorduyn & De Groot, 1999, Van der Ploeg, 2001).

The political situation in Cameroon in general is influenced by two different systems. First of all there is the traditional power hierarchy that has been operative since time immemorial and that differs depending on the region. Second, through the colonisation process modern political systems have been introduced into Cameroon.

The French colonists who took over the colonisation from the Germans after the First world war, were charmed by the well-organised traditional systems of the Fulbe and used these systems to control their territory, and as a consequence, Fulbe leaders obtained a strong position. Their power provided control over natural resources. Colonialism thus led to an increase in inequality and social stratification as the Fulbe elite gained more opportunities and resources than they had before colonisation (Van den Berg, 1997, p.56). Especially in the Far North this has led to the oppression of the non-Muslim groups[11].

Cameroon became independent in 1960. The political administration was structured according to the French system of prefectures and sous-prefectures. The sous-prefet in turn commands local chiefs. The first President of the Republic was Ahmadu Ahidjo, who was a Fulbe. Consequently, politics were highly dominated by the Muslim elite. Applying this to the two different research areas of this dissertation, this very roughly means that in the Far North the national politics mainly favoured the Fulbe. In Central Province, this favoured the Babouti who, in contrast to the Baveck, are Moslim.

In 1982 things considerably changed when Paul Biya, a Christian from the south, succeeded Ahidjo. Until today, Biya is still President in spite of several elections with, according to most Cameroonians, widespread fraud and French support. Especially, the

[11] As explained before these groups are often called Kirdi. However, since this term is rather complicated and is not important for this research, I will not discuss this further here. See for more information Schilder, 1994.

elections in 1992, under pressure from the World Bank were meant as political reform to fight against the economic crisis that had started in 1985. During the regime of Biya, the Moslims had gradually lost their political hegemony, leading to a more balanced situation. As a result, the contemporary government now consists of ministers with both a Christian as well as a Moslim background.

Remarkably, in the Far North, as well as in Central Province, the two political systems have co-existed until now which means that traditional chiefs rule together with public officers in one area. This also applies to the non-Muslim groups like the Baveck in Central Province. In some cases there is a clear division of tasks, in other cases it may also lead to serious conflicts. It appears that in many cases, such as among the fishermen in the Far North province, local rules about who has access to certain resources are far more important than general rules coming from administrators in Yaounde or the head of conservation of the Waza National Park. This is probably due to a deep-seated distrust and suspicion with respect to the government as a result of the worsening situation characterised by corruption and abuse.

Because of this, it seems important to consider the powerful members of each group. This includes in the first place the chief of the village but there are other powerful people in a society, especially those involved with religion, such as the *marabout* among the Fulbe. More will be said about religion in the next section.

4.6 Religion and spiritual contexts

In Cameroon there are two official religions: Christianity and Islam. Very roughly it can be said that the population in the south of Cameroon is Christian (both Protestant and Catholic) whereas most Moslims live in the Far North. This has, of course, a historical background as has been discussed in 4.3. However, in practice this division is too simplistic. Apart from these two official religions there are many animistic groups all over Cameroon, whose lives are based on a traditional belief in spirits and natural powers. Many people in Cameroon, especially in the Far North, claim to be purely animists. Besides, the three creeds are often largely mixed up. This implies not only that in all regions we can find people with different religions living together, but also that even one individual person is often inspired by elements from different religions. In Yaounde, for example, there is a great variety of sectarian movements, partly based on Christianity but infiltrated with animistic elements. Since most people have not had extensive formal education, the practical way in which people profess their religion is not strict and can be easily influenced by external factors.

It could be assumed that all Cameroonians, including scientists and the President himself, are to a certain extent influenced by the belief in supernatural phenomena[12]. This includes all sorts of witchcraft and sorcery. Everywhere in Cameroon you encounter people

[12] This statement is based on many conversations I have had with Cameroonian colleagues.

wearing amulets (*grisgris*) to protect them against a variety of evil forces. The number of traditional witch doctors is too numerous to count. In Central Province, visibly more than in the Far North, people consider it to be crucial to consult and bring honour to their ancestors.

An interesting book about witchcraft in modern Cameroon has been written by Geschiere (1997). He shows that although witchcraft is often assumed to be traditional, it is deeply intertwined with modern changes and, what is more, there is a strong association between witchcraft and politics (see also Rowlands & Warnier, 1988). Witchcraft often plays crucial role in discourses on power. It offers hidden means to wrest power but at the same time it reflects sharp feelings of impotence; it serves especially to hide the sources of power (p.9). Consequently, we can expect witchcraft to play an important role too in environmental issues, for example, the access to natural resources. The other way around is also true, especially the natural environment is full of supernatural forces which in turn can be expected to play a role in stories that deal with political issues which do not necessarily refer to the environment in a literal way. For the subject of this dissertation it is thus important to pay some more attention to the issue of witchcraft in relation to the environment.

The natural environment is believed to be inhabited by natural spirits that are perceived as either good or evil. Evil ones are often called *diables,* sometimes literally perceived as the devil, ***i.e.*** the opponent of God. Some people in the Far North claim to recognise animals that are genii (the Fulbe name for spirit) by the fact that they wear metal rings or other decorations. One interesting proof of this was explained by a fisherman from the Far North who lived close to the Maga lake. He claimed to have seen birds that were wearing a metal ring on their leg, obviously referring to migratory birds from Europe, which were ringed by scientific research stations there.

It is commonly believed the Maga Lake, as well as other water currents such as the Logo Matya river near Zina, are inhabited by mermaids. These mermaids, locally called Mamiwata, play an important role in stories about accidents in the water. Many cases are known in which people have been kidnapped by mermaids and taken to a domain under the water. In some particular cases people have managed to free themselves and return to the human world. These people have obtained supernatural gifts.

Big trees in particular are often inhabited by spirits, which makes it extremely dangerous to cut them. One concrete example of this is a big Baobab tree in Essandja, the village near Ndjolé in Central Province. When Miguel arrived with his logging company in Essandja they asked him not to cut the baobab because it was not an ordinary tree. One of the villagers explained to me:

" The baobab was a witch tree. There was a kettle on top of it, invisible. In the beginning there were four such trees. When the old wise man realised that witchcraft was going to destroy the village, they changed the tree from a witch tree into a protection tree. They forbade that anything wrong be done to it. In the dry season when all the trees are dry, it is blooming as if it has rained. This indicates that the village is in a sound state. If the leaves

begin to dry it means something is going wrong in the village. The problem with Miguel is that he makes a lot of noise so even the big animals have left and so has the power in the village. If people do not respect the sacred trees and the animals, the power decreases."

Miguel finally respected the demand of the villagers but in another small settlement Voundé there was also a sacred tree. The villagers told him the tree should not be cut. Miguel did not respect this and gave the order to cut the tree. He sent a woodman to fell the tree. The woodman spent the whole night cutting but the tree did not fall. Finally the tree started bleeding, and fell down but the following day the woodman died.

Both Nguila and Ndjolé claim to have a sacred forest. The one from Ndjolé is situated about 6 km from the centre of the village. It is called Yadjongo forest. This forest is the home to a sacred elephant, called Mbongue, who is about 2.5 meters high. This elephant is invisible and you would never be able to kill him. The sacred forest of Nguila is right on the top of the sacred hill where the villagers once started their settlement.

These stories, as well as many others that will be discussed later, show the actuality of spiritual matters in daily life in Cameroon. For the discussion of these stories later in this dissertation it is useful to distinguish three aspects of witchcraft: shapeshifting, black magic and totemism. These will be briefly discussed here.

Shapeshifting

The belief in witchcraft includes the idea of transformations: invisible spirits, animals and humans transforming into one another. The *Mbororo*, the nomadic pastoralists from the Far North, are often seen as real shapeshifters. They are animists and there is a lot of mystification around them. They are commonly believed to transform into animals, especially during the night. The transformations often take place in termite hills or during a twister. These animals, so-called *waylourou,* cannot endure the light.

Shapeshifted animals are especially known for damage caused to cultivated land. In Central Province, hedgehogs in particular are causing a lot of damage. They are often understood to be shapeshifted women taking revenge on their husband or co-wives. The best proof of this is to go to your field at night and wait for the shapeshifters. According to several stories, people take off their clothes before transforming. If you take their clothes away, they remain naked when changing back into the human form.

In the Far North, elephants especially are often related to shapeshifting. Apart from the usual stories about family affairs, it sometimes touches on a higher political level[13]. In a very famous story from the village of Moutourwa, that was even known in the South of Cameroon, an invasion of elephants was related to a conflict about land between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers. I will return to this in section 5.5.3.

[13] The relation between shapeshifting and politics is commonly known in other countries in the world. For examples I refer to the book edited by Knight (2000).

Among hunters in Central Province there are many stories about shapeshifted buffaloes. Attacks by buffaloes on hunters are often understood as revenge, being the follow-up of an earlier battle between the hunter and another person. According to many villagers there are different kinds of buffaloes. The most common distinction made is between white buffaloes and red or black buffaloes. The white buffalo especially is rarely seen and this is always associated with an human incarnation.

The fact that different forms of existence interchange through shapeshifting means that the division between the spiritual world, the natural world and the human world becomes more vague. In addition, as with witchcraft in general, shapeshifting is often related to political matters. As we shall see, the subject of shapeshifting plays an important role in stories dealing with the environment.

Black magic

Another phenomenon described both in Central Province as well as in the Far North concerns certain people that possess black magic in the form of a bird that flies out of the body through the genital organs. The body of the owner is inanimate during the flight of the bird through the night. The bird looks for victims, especially young girls. Once found, it enters the body of the victim through the genitals and takes out the heart of the victim. It then returns to the body of the owner and enters again. This is how the owner gets nourished and finds back his or her vitality. A villager in the Far North talked about this magic, called *mysteridjo*:

Once a man married a woman without knowing her. One morning, at about 6 am, the man went to the mosque and wanted to wake up his wife to go and pray with him. But the woman did not move. The man did not go to the mosque. He sat down and suddenly he heard a bird fly into the house. The bird was very small and if it flew he could see different coloured lights in the night. Blue, green and fire red.

The bird sat down on the woman. The man caught the bird and put it in a calabash. Then he went to the mosque. When he returned from the mosque he opened the calabash and the bird flew out and entered into the woman's body. The woman awoke and the man received a shock and wanted to divorce immediately.

A lot of information has been found about the origin of this type of witchcraft. According to the same informant in Pette, it comes from Mora in the Mandara mountains[14]. There was one *mysteridjo* called Tjoetabenbal in a neighbouring village and he came to the chief's home on the pretext of curing but in fact it had already eaten 99 people and was looking for the hundredth. Another informant said that the *mysteridjo* is typically from Bornoi, Kotoko and Canuri tribes.

[14] This is indeed the place the animists fled to during the process of islamization.

Many different stories were found in the Far North as well as in Central Province that explain the origin of this black magic. I will return in detail to this theme in section 5.5.3, but I would briefly introduce some explanations here. According to a story in Central Province, it is a power from outside in the form of a small blood-sucking animal that at a certain moment began to co-exist with human beings. In the Far North one of the explanations for this witchcraft is that it is related to cannibalism. Before colonisation, there were cannibalistic groups in Cameroon. Then the French came and forbade these practices but a group ate human meat and is now continuing its practices in a mysterious way. Another explanation from the Far North refers to the place witchcraft has in the Fulbe society. According to a Fulbe informant in Pette, witchcraft is a punishment of God. An ethnic group had stolen something from the prophet Mohammed, they were punished but sold their curse to other people, including bad Fulbe. Thus, witchcraft did not originally exist among the Fulbe since it concerns disobedience to religion. Apart from this story there are many stories, in the Far North as well as in Central Province, that relate the power of the *mysteridjo* to God. Finally, according to some animists in the Far North, it has originated from the bad practices of a stepmother, beating her stepchild. Finally she killed the child and burnt it, threw the ashes in the sauce and ate them. This made her a witch.

The mystical power of the *mysteridjo* is inherited from mother to daughter or from father to son. However, the bird can also be rented or exchanged, for example, with a child. Maman Mataba, a young woman from Pette tells how you can even buy this *mysteridjo* witchcraft: *"You take a serugo and a knife and go to the quarter where the witches live. Tell them you have come to buy what they know. They will take your serugo and knife, and they will give you a piece of meat instead. You have to eat it. They will ask you whether you are sure you can keep the* mysteridjo*, and you have to eat another piece of meat. Then you pay. The meat will turn you into a witch."*

Apart from this general account, there are many stories about incidental cases in which people bought witchcraft either from the witch people or from the bird.

The best way to chase a *mysteridjo* away is to throw sand at it. It is said that the next day you can find the person who still has sand in his eyes. A victim can be cured with the boiling sauce of the *folere*. The owner of the *mysteridjo* has to stir the sauce with his finger and the victim has to drink it.

Totemism

The last concept that needs to be discussed since it plays an important role in stories is totemism. Totemism is a subject extensively described in anthropology and although it is not my intention to discuss this in detail, I will dedicate a few words to it here. In literature, totemism is a controversial term (see e.g. Luning 1991) with many definitions. It can be generally defined as a special relationship between an animal or a plant and a group of people, often expressed by rituals (Kloos, 1981 p. 247). Fortes (in Luning, 1991, p. 33)

defines it as a humanisation of the environment, especially attributing human characteristics to animals.

Probably the most prominent writers who did research on this phenomenon is Levi-Strauss. Although there is much to say about his comprehensive research, I will limit myself to some of his conclusions here. According to this author (1974b), totemism is an expression of a more general phenomenon. Apart from being an identification of human beings with animals or plants, it also always refers to a denomination of a group based on lineage. Here he points to the confusion between totems and the phenomenon that individual people can start a relationship with an animal that becomes the guardian of his spirit. Moreover, he states that totems interrelate and form oppositions by belonging to dualistic groups.

In Cameroon totemism (the French word 'totem' is literally used by local people here) applies more to the general relationship between man and animal, than to the characteristics stated by Levi-Strauss. This implies that local people factually 'confuse' both categories as Levi-Strauss states. In my further research I will not discuss this problem and I will use the term totemism referring to the more general definition as used by Kloos and Fortes.

Totemism occurs in all ethnic groups investigated, except the Fulbe who claim to be pure Muslims. They say that Mohammed has forbidden worshipping any other creature but Allah. Both animals and trees can act as a totem. In most cases in Cameroon, however, the totem is an animal. Totems can have a symbolic meaning for an individual person, a family, a village or a whole ethnic group. Personal totems are rare and were only found in Central Province. They are attributed to very powerful people. After death, these people are believed to give their power to an animal and keep on living in the spirit of their totem-animal. The relationship with the totem-animal originates from a certain encounter in the past, when the animal appeared and played a crucial role either for a group or for an individual.

Generally, people make a distinction between two kinds of totems: protective totems and destructive totems. Most totems are protective but especially personal totems can turn into destructive ones after the death of that specific person. If the totem is not ritually given back to the dead person or his descendant, the animal gets lost in the wilderness and from time to time shows up to take revenge. In spite of these cases, most villages, or group of villages, have a totem that is supposed to protect their people. It has done so in the past because of a special relationship with the ancestors including, sometimes, marriages between the animal and an ancestor. As could be expected, there are many stories that explain why a certain animal is the totem of their group. Some examples will be discussed in chapter 5.

Totems are usually treated respectfully. People never eat the meat of a totem animal, or never take off branches from a totem tree. If you eat a totem you either die or you get serious illnesses like leprosy or bleedings. The animals that are seen as totems are in general big fearsome mammals, such as elephants or lions in the Far North, and buffaloes or panthers[15] in

[15] Although locally called panthers, people probably mean leopards or big felines.

Central Province, or other frightening creatures like snakes. For practically all Kotoko in the Far North, the ethnic totem is the giant monitor lizard. For the Babouti the ethnic totem is the panther. For the Beti (a collective name for a number of tribes in the south of Cameroon) the totem is the snake. In many villages in Central Province the village totem is the turtle. Although the turtle is not considered to be big or threatening, it has an important meaning in many stories from Central Province (see chapter 5).

5 Stories and storytelling in the Far North and Central Province

5.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters I have outlined the theoretical and practical context in which the study was carried out. In the present chapter an overview will be given of the different stories that were collected during the fieldwork.

Stories are known, told and retold every day in Cameroon. The liveliness of this old tradition in contemporary Cameroon is comparable to that which is found in other African countries (e.g. Schipper, 1990b). When studying stories in general one may often notice large similarities between different regions (Schipper, 1990b; Bal, 1997; Paulme 1976). This is what makes it possible to develop general narratological theories and classifications. In the present study too, many similarities were found while comparing storytelling in the Far North and in Central Province. In spite of a distance of some 1200 km, not only were very similar storytelling situations found, but the stories themselves also showed many parallels. Sometimes exactly the same stories were heard in Central Province as in the Far North. And what is more: they often deal with universal themes that may also be found, for example, in European fairy tales and the fables of *La Fontaine*. This confirms the idea that stories are adapted, transformed and understood in cross-cultural settings. Naturally, this is an important prerequisite if one wants to use stories for intercultural communication. On the other hand, it should be noticed that every region also has its specific stories that deal with characteristics, such as those related to the landscape and that are unknown in other regions.

Narratological theory asserts that there are three main points of attention when studying stories: setting, format and content. In the next section, attention will be paid to the settings in which storytelling takes place. The main focus is on finding out what are the most common natural storytelling settings, since these could in the end act as a basis for starting up an intercultural dialogue. In the subsequent section, the stories themselves will be discussed with respect to format. What kinds of story formats occur and what are the peculiarities of each format? Finally, I will discuss the story content. Practically, for presenting the content in this dissertation, I had to choose a way of classifying the vast number of stories. For reasons explained in section 2.4, I preferred to use local classifications. In all cases, however, the local categorisation of stories turned out to be quite simple, and related mainly to the difference between fact and fiction. I will come back to this in section 5.3.1. Since the local categorisation would not suffice for the discussion of the stories in this chapter a distinction is made between fictional stories, non-fictional histories and mythical stories; although the differences between the three categories are not always clear. Thus, this division serves mainly practical purposes and is not related to any fixed paradigm.

In each section of this chapter, both research regions are intertwined. As will become clear later on, this is justified by the similarity in storytelling between the two regions. Moreover, by presenting the data of the two regions simultaneously, this data can be more easily compared and focused on the potential value of stories on a more general level.

5.2 Storytelling Settings

5.2.1 Time and place of storytelling

In all villages, stories may be told anywhere and any time. No situation was found in which it was strictly forbidden to tell a story because the time or place was inappropriate. This does exclude that in the traditions of Cameroon categories of stories do exist that obey certain rules, for example those that belong to initiation rites or secret practices. There are many such traditions, but since the focus of this research is on the general instrumental value of stories, minor attention has been paid to these type of stories.

In spite of the absence of any strict rules, people have their preferences. Sometimes they simply refused to tell a story because they were too busy with other things, or because they preferred telling it in another setting. Moreover, when we look a bit closer into the storytelling tradition, there seem to be many reasons for choosing an appropriate time and place. The older people in particular tend to obey this tradition.

With regard to time, storytelling usually takes place after darkness. The best time to tell a story is between 7 and 10 p.m. Daytime is needed for working and storytelling is not considered to be real work. Moreover, there appear to be beliefs that hold people back from telling stories during daytime. These ideas are found back in many expressions. Examples of these expressions are:

"If you tell stories during daytime, you will have no food at night." (Fulbe proverb)
"If you tell stories during daytime, you will get lost if you travel." (Kotoko proverb)

Evening-time is also preferred since it is related to a special kind of atmosphere. In the evening there is more room for hidden powers, fantasy and imagination. One of the storytellers in Central Province said: "Stories deal with another side of reality and therefore need another environment."

As with time, the place where a story should be told is not prescribed but people in general prefer a semi-private place. In the Far North, the patio around the house is often chosen. Especially in the cold months of January and February in the Far North, the patio is enriched by a campfire that is used to give light and warmth and to boil water for tea. In Central Province people usually stay inside their houses in the evening. Most of the villages do not

have electricity so oil-lamps are used for lighting the room, providing at the same time a suitable atmosphere for storytelling.

Although nowadaysa private place is preferred, in earlier times storytelling seemed to have a more central position in the village. This can be found back in some stories, for example in the following story from Vouger Simon from Ndjolé in which he refers to the '*case à palabre*' (or '*arbre à palabre*'), a specific roof or tree in the centre of the village.

It was under this 'case à palabre' that we met each other. We made a fire and stayed there until very late in the night. And it was under this 'case à palabre' that one became crazy. There were the children who fell asleep very early who never understood what their grandparents and the old wise men said. There were the old wise people who spoke about the life of the children and they said: " what we are doing here on earth?"
It was under the 'case à palabre' that we got the wisdom.

5.2.2 The storyteller

' Ce n'est pas le conte qui conte mais le conteur qui raconte.'

This expression from Central Province points at the importance of the storyteller. Indeed, different narrators can tell the same story[1] in a very different way, causing different effects. During a session in Nguila someone in the audience interrupted the storyteller by remarking that he had already heard the story. The rest of the audience immediately corrected him however, saying that every storyteller tells a different story.

Both in the Far North and Central Province storytellers vary in age and sex. Annex 3 presents a total list of all the storytellers, including information about gender, age, ethnic group as well as answers to the question where he or she has got the story from and what is the purpose of storytelling. When asking the storytellers about the use of storytelling, the principal reason mentioned was entertainment. Education was mentioned second, mainly in the case of a mother telling stories to her children.

From the words of Vouger Simon cited in the previous section, one could conclude that storytellers were mostly old wise men. Looking at the storytellers in the present study, however, we see a lot of young people, including children who are able to tell stories. This shows that the tradition is still very much alive today.

Analysing the data with respect to gender, women appear to be telling stories as much as men do. According to both men and women, women are good storytellers. This is probably related to the fact that stories are often told to children. This is mainly the task of the woman since she is in charge of the education of the children. Although women know a lot of stories

[1] Strictly speaking, we should say 'fabula' instead of 'story'. However, for the general presentation I prefer using the word 'story' in its general meaning.

many only feel free to tell them as long as there are no adult men around. As soon as men join the group women tend to stay more in the background and sometimes even refuse to tell a story. This reaction of women is seen more often in the (Moslim) Far North than in (Christian) Central Province. There is more to say about the gender factor with respect to format and content of stories but it is necessary to first discuss the general characteristics of story formats and contents. I will come back to the issue of gender in section 5.7.

In many countries of West Africa, e.g. Senegal and Mali, professional storytellers exist (see e.g. Jansen *et al*., 1998; Janson, 2002). These so-called *griots* or bards travel from village to village and fulfill a variety of roles as singers, musicians, historians, genealogists, spokespersons and diplomats. They are rewarded for their performances with gifts consisting of money or goods. In Cameroon *griots* were only found among the Fulbe in the Far North and the profession of *griot* seems to be limited here to being a servant of the traditional chief: the *lamido* or sultan. His or her task is to play music and announce the presence of the chief on special days. Furthermore in Cameroon *griots* are often invited to amuse people during weddings or baptisms, or to animate a meeting when people want to collect money for a special purpose in the village during a *caisse voluntaire.* They sometimes approach a person individually and sing about his heroic activities. *Griots* in the Far North often master several instruments including the traditional guitar, drums and saxophone. They are members of a guild of *griots* led by one '*chef de griots*'.

The existence of *griots* in the Far North may explain why the collection of stories in the Far North was often complicated by the fact that older storytellers in particular only wanted to tell stories for money. This was never encountered in Central Province.

The storyteller has a respected position while performing. This means that even small children are given full opportunity to tell their story until the end. A storyteller is only seldom interrupted. The only regular kind of interruption noticed was to convey information to the storyteller by laughing or small emotional expressions, for example showing fear or amazement. Sometimes words from the teller are repeated in order to put emphasis on what is told. Criticising the teller by correcting him or by asking questions is rarely done. Asking a question is generally interpreted as a sign that you do not trust the storyteller. You then imply that the storyteller lies or is not expressing himself very well. As a consequence, the audience is not very critical. People seem to accept any kind of story, even if, as I discovered in interviews, it appeared that sometimes they did not consider it to be logical at all. This is of course important information in case supra-locals want to tell a story to local people. Apparently, the extent to which local people listen to a story is no guarantee of whether they appreciate the story or not.

5.2.3 The audience

In spite of the usually private location in which storytelling takes place, the sessions are never closed. Anyone is allowed to join in. Storytelling often starts with a small group but in

the course of time many people may walk in (or walk away), often resulting in an heterogeneous audience of over fifty participants including many children. From the audience new storytellers present themselves, so there are no fixed storytellers. One story simply follows another.

The open character of storytelling sessions may sometimes give the impression of being chaotic and it is difficult to know whether people are really listening. While a story is being told, little background conversations among the audience may go on simultaneously. In Central Province especially, the storytellers use tricks to get the attention of the audience. This includes songs or short rhymes that demand a response from the audience. Apart from this, in many cases one person from the audience spontaneously takes up the role of responder, confirming each phrase of the storyteller with a little word. Rarely does the storyteller interrupt his story due to an inattentive audience. Apart from songs there are many tools with which the teller can keep the attention of the audience. These tools will be discussed in the next section.

5.3 Story formats

5.3.1 Local categories

Before going into detail about the format of stories I will first discuss the different story types distinguished by the local people in the different regions. Although this categorisation is mainly related to the content of the story, it is also reflected in the format of the story. That is why it is important to discuss it first.

In the Far North of Cameroon, among the Fulbe (and other tribes that speak the Fulbe language), stories are distinguished by two types, called *talol* and *taria*. *Talol* is used to indicate a huge realm of stories with a fictional character, mostly using animal characters. Although locals do not further divide this category I will make a provisional subdivision to give an impression of this realm. It includes the following types:

- Moralistic stories, often associated with fear and punishment,
- Aetiological stories: (humorous) explanations for natural phenomena,
- Dilemma stories: ending with a question,
- Fairy tales: looking much like European fairy tales or stories from 'The thousand and one Nights',
- Rather long and funny stories that tell of the adventures of some animals or humans.

Taria on the other hand is the term for non-fictional stories including legends, myths and real anecdotes.

In Central Province there is a distinction between three categories of stories. The first type is called *nkanna* in Baveck. Its equivalent in Babouti is *gèn.* The second is called *panapo* in Baveck and *gevìn* in Babouti. These two categorisations together roughly fall into

the *talol* category from the Far North. The first type, *nkanna* or *gèn*, concerns fictional timeless stories about animals and may be compared with the first three types of the *talol* mentioned above. They often have a high educational value. Many of these *nkanna* contain a concrete message that is or could be summarised in a proverb, often stated at the end of the story. The second type, *panapo* or *gevìn*, includes fictional stories about daily life, mainly about people. It often centres on an important king and his beautiful daughter. They are told mostly for entertainment and can be compared with the last two types of the *talol.* In practice, however, there is a lot of discussion among people themselves about whether a story is a *panapo* or a *nkanna*. Some villagers explained that the difference between the two mainly concerns how the story ends. A *nkanna* starts from an ideal situation, then a problem shows up which finally leads to a less profitable situation. *Panapo*, on the other hand, start with the same scheme but they end up with a solution for the problem, so there is a happy ending. The most common type of *panapo* is a story about a beautiful woman who is desired by many men (or animals). Finally the small one gets the girl because he is clever, whereas the big one was too arrogant.

Although *panapos* are fictional tales this name is sometimes given to non-fiction legends as well. Nevertheless, there is a third category corresponding entirely to the non-fictional stories, thus comparable to the *taria* in the Far North. In Babouti these stories dealing with non-fictional events in the past, are called *s'aa.* In Baveck they are called *nlan.*

Apart from these categories there is a close link between stories and proverbs and between stories and riddles. Many proverbs are linked with a story in which the proverb is the concluding (moral) remark. In this study, however, little specific attention is paid to proverbs and riddles. They will only be mentioned for enriching the other data.

It could be very interesting for the purpose of this study that the local distinction between stories is largely based on the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. Whenever one wants to draw conclusions from listening to stories it is of course most important to know how to interpret them and thus to know whether a story is meant as a literal representation of reality or as a metaphorical idea. However, in spite of the clear local categorisation with respect to this, in practice the distinction between reality and fiction is very vague. It is often complicated by issues that concern the content of the story, and I will come back to this issue later in this dissertation. Notwithstanding this, the format of a story often refers clearly to one of the categories by announcing it in the first line. This so-called 'beginning formula' is one of the fixed format elements that is often used in stories. These formulas will be discussed in the next section.

5.3.2 Story formulas

Characteristic for many stories are their typically formal way of starting and ending by fixed sentences.The beginning formula in Fulbe is:

Talol talol, gombel, gombel, gombiti, gombel

Here 'talol' means story and 'gombel' means a traditional pen made of millet stalk that is mostly used in Islamic schools.

Among another ethnic group of the Far North, the Mousgoum, the story formally starts with:

Mirzi, mirzi dam tui

I have come to explain you a story.

Kotoko, also from the Far North, start a story with a short dialogue between storyteller and audience:

Teller:	*Djigui djigui*	(story, story)
Audience:	*Djigui*	
Teller:	*Djigui kuida kuida*	(big story)
Audience:	*Djigui*	
Teller:	*Djigui ngouna ngouna*	(small story)
Audience:	*Djigui*	
Teller:	*Djigui…*	(he announces the subject of the story)

In Central Province, among the Babouti, a story is started by:

Gèn ii deng, gèn ii deng

The first *deng* has a high intonation, the second one a low intonation, meaning: the story was, the story has been. In some other cases the beginning was translated as: the story made, the story has made.

Among the Baveck a story formally starts with:

*Nkanna komè na (*or *panapo komè na)*

The nkanna (or panapo) has made that….

Apart from these formal beginnings there are many alternatives for beginning a story such as using a title or announcing the subject by saying: this is a story about…

Other narrators start their story with a question like: "So what was happening?" These sentences are called 'external-focalised sentences' in narratology (Bal 1997), since these words are not pronounced by one of the story characters. External-focalised sentences are not only used to begin a story but also play an important role throughout it. It is part of the narration style which will be further discussed in section 5.3.3

Finally, a story may be started with a song. After the song is sung, the storyteller says: "This song is coming from a story that made that…"

As with beginnings, there are also formulas to end a story. Here we first have to make the distinction between stories with a closed end and those with an open end (see section 2.4).

Most of my stories collected have a closed end. In Central Province the closing formula is simply limited to a remark like: "the story has finished". Among the Fulbe a story ends with a phrase that needs more explanation, namely: "*Takalamoulous takande". Takalamoeloes* means: the end of the story. *Takande* is a traditional Cameroonian meat dish that has been cooked for several months. Although still edible, according to the informants the meat becomes a homogenous sauce. The dish is served during ceremonial days and eaten by men only. This, at first sight, strange association between stories and food was explained by several villagers. At the end of the story the word *takande* is used to indicate how all the different elements from the story have become re-united. In the beginning there is differentiation of persons and events. By the end everything has again become an undifferentiated whole.

Other typical ways to end a story are by putting in a concluding, usually moralistic remark. In some cases this has the form of a proverb. Only mentioning this proverb on later occasions immediately reminds people of the story and often evokes the retelling of it.

A minor number of stories have an open end; they end with a question or dilemma. These are the only questions that really provoke an opinion or reaction from the audience. They often deal with several personages with specific characters and the audience has to judge who is the strongest, bravest etc.

The way a story is begun and ended may have an impact on how people listen to the story. This includes the general attentiveness of the audience, but also their interpretation of the meaning a story may have in terms of being serious or funny, fiction or non-fiction, known or unknown. Next to these formulas there are other style elements that may influence the way a story is assimilated by the audience. These will be discussed in the next section.

5.3.3 Narration styles

Besides the fixed formulae there are many techniques a storyteller may use to enrich the narration. A story is considered to be good if it uses as many of these techniques as possible. This confirms the importance of the storyteller. In fact a story is never good in itself but it is the storyteller that makes it a good story. Consequently, stories vary a lot in the way they are told. This may, for instance, be seen in the length of the story. The shortest story I heard took about a minute whereas the longest story I heard took about one hour. From the old traditions like the *Mvet*[2] (Eno Belinga, 1996) or Sunjata (Jansen *et al*., 1998) we know that one story may last for an entire night.

During the storytelling sessions it becomes clear that different stories and even different versions of one story are assimilated in a totally different way by the audience. The

[2] This tradition is based on a series of stories, including myths about the origin of the world (see section 5.6.3) that are not commonly known but told by initiated men mainly from the Southern province of Cameroon. The tradition covers a large region including south Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. It belongs to the Beti, Fang and Bulu ethnic groups.

differences concern both appreciation (entertainment aspect) as well as understanding (education aspect). In this section, the most occurring narration techniques are discussed. These are: songs, repetitive phrases, onomatopoeia, hyperboles and grammatical features.

Probably the most important style element in many stories is the use of songs. Both in the Far North as well as in Central Province songs occur in many stories. For the Baveck the occurrence of the song determines the difference between a *nkanna* (with song) and a *panapo* (without song).

There are, however, some differences with regard to the use of songs among different ethnic groups. Among Fulbe and Arabchoa in the Far North, singing is only done by women and children. Men feel ashamed to sing since they experience it as diminishing their status. Mousgoum and Kotoko men, on the contrary, do sing though only in rare cases. In Central Province, among the Baveck and Babouti, singing is more common by men as well as women. Another important difference between the Far North and Central Province is that in Central Province, singing is always supposed to take place in interaction with the audience. The storyteller sings a line that is responded to by a refrain consisting of a couple of words to be sung by the audience. If the audience does not show enough reaction the storyteller often repeats the song or even interrupts the story.

The use of songs in stories probably originates from earlier times in which storytelling was accompanied by music. In the Far North, some of the instruments used were drums (*bagu*) and violin (*garaya* or *moloru*). In Central Province they used flute (*ototon*), drums (*nkul*), tambour (*mbaï*) or *Mvet*. The latter is a stringed instrument consisting of four or five strings divided into two parts and attached to a wooden stick. The tones are amplified by three calabashes. (see figure 5.1). It is the only instrument that is still used in the present-day tradition of the *Mvet.*

In spite of the fact that instruments are no longer used, the songs help to keep the rhythm of telling the story. Moreover, they can help the teller to remember the story. Finally, songs stimulate the involvement of the audience in the session and make the story more animated.

Songs occur in a story for different narratological reasons. First they are used to indicate an uncommon, often supernatural communication, like the one between humans and spirits, between human and their ancestors or between humans and animals. Moreover, in some cases songs play a prominent role in saving the character in the story, e.g. in stories in which the song of a bird announces impending danger.

The rhythm of the story is also supported by the use of repetitive phrases or leit-motifs. Storytellers rarely use textual shortcuts such as ‘and so forth’ or references to earlier passages. Instead, they prefer repeating complete sentences, songs or parts of a story.

The use of onomatopoeia is another way of creating rhythm. Onomatopoeia is the formation of words from sounds resembling those associated with the object or action named.

Figure 5.1: Mvet player (photo by Eno Belinga, 1996).

Examples of the onomatopoeia are: *koutecup, koutecup, koutecup* (galloping horse) or *pompom pompom* (walking in a hurry). The narratological line, and thus the rhythm, is from time to time interrupted on purpose to keep the audience focused. This may also be done by suddenly mentioning the real name of someone from the audience, or by interrupting the story with non-narrative phrases such as: "And what do you think he should do?" or "With what are you listening?" In many cases these are rhetorical questions and the teller does not expect the audience to comment.

Another technique to make a story livelier is by the use of hyperboles. Hyperboles are exaggerated examples to illustrate something. The powerfulness of a king for example can be expressed by indicating that he is able to strike twenty elephants with only one bullet. This aspect is also related as jokes. To my own ear, audiences in Cameroon appear remarkably unsophisticated preferring jokes that involve excrements, genital organs, intestines coming out, and so forth. These phenomena are visualised as much as possible by the use of hyperboles, making it as theatrical as possible.

The last technique I will mention is related to grammatical aspects of the language, in particular the use of direct and indirect sense and the use of tenses. Direct sense is preferred above indirect sense since it make the story more actual and active. For the same reason the present tense is preferred above the past tense and the past perfect above the simple past.

5.3.4 Different versions of one story

There are many versions of one story. In fact, a story is never told in the same way twice. In none of the cases I experienced in my fieldwork did the narrator recite a fixed text. With this in mind it should be noted that it is not clear whether one speaks about a different version of one story or a different story. I will not go into detail to discuss this problem. Instead, I will rather focus on the pragmatic question of whether one can talk about one version being better or more authentic than another. The question is important for two reasons. First, one cannot be sure whether what people tell you is part of their common tradition or whether they imitate or even just invent it, for example to satisfy the demands of the researcher. Secondly, in case one story is indeed perceived to be more authentic than another, this may influence the way in which a story is perceived by the audience. In the case of the introduction of a new story, for example, this story may have to compete with already existing stories. In order to answer this question let me first briefly discuss different story versions.

The different versions can be related to the story format. Consider the story told in Box 5.1. In the Far North the same story was told as in Central Province. The only difference was that in the Far North the story ended with a dilemma whereas in Central Province it had a closed ending.

Furthermore, different narration styles such as the use of hyperboles cause variation. The fact that the story text is not fixed such as in the case of a written text makes it easy to introduce information for illustration or exaggeration. Stories appear to be very dynamic and

can easily accommodate new elements like modern attributes such as rifles or cars instead of arrows and horses.

Box 5.1: The bee and the crab.
Ndjolé: Mbong Ernest, age 47, male, Baveck.

There were two persons: one was called Yombé the bee, and the other Mbeck the crab. These two were friends. So the bee said: "Why should we not for one day meet with our two families together and have dinner?" And the crab said: "Yeh, why not. If we live together we should do that so our families could meet each other." The bee said: "You come first to my house with your children." So they made an appointment. The bee said to his wife: "Make us a dinner, the crab is coming to eat here with us." The woman had already prepared everything. The bee was sitting at the table with his children. There came the crab: top-clob-top-clob, he was jumping. There was a lot of rain. When he finally arrived, the bee said to him: "Welcome for dinner." When he saw the paws of the crab that were very dirty he said: "How can you eat with such dirty hands? Go to the veranda and you will find some water to wash your hands." The crab went outside washing his hands but when he returned his hands were dirty again from the ground. "Go and wash them again", said the bee. He went again but when returning they became dirty again. During that time the bee and his family were already eating. The crab tried to clean his paws but they became dirty again. "I cannot eat with someone who has dirty hands." said the bee. The dinner was finished and the crab returned home, hungry and angry. But first he said to the bee: "You will come to my house in two days and we will have dinner." When he went home he told his wife. Two days later his wife made a nice meal and put it on the table. The bee realised that the hour of the appointment had come, and went on his way. "Welcome, welcome" said the crab. "Noum, noum, noum" went the wings of the bee. It was like listening to a balafon player. "Huh", said the crab "we are not going to eat while listening to the music you make, put your instrument away and then come back for dinner." The bee went home and when he returned the music was still there. The crab said: " how is it possible? We cannot eat while listening to that music. Leave your instrument at home." During that time the crab and his family were finishing their meal. The bee discovered that there was nothing left. You understand that these two were friends. It is strictly forbidden for two friends to have the same intelligence. One has to be cleverer than another. This is the end.

Dilemma version: Fadare: Abba Mouloum, age 27, male, Bornoi.
One day, the frog invited all the animals for a big party at his house. All the animals came, and they found a big table full of drinks and food. The bee was the last one to arrive and the frog said: "To be honest, I don't like your tamtam very much. The buzzling noise you make is too loud. You are disturbing my party. Go back and leave your tamtam home before coming to my party."
The bee returned home and tried to leave her tamtam but when coming back she still made the same noise. The frog sent her back home again and when she came back for the third time she found that the party was over and all the food was finished.
The next day, the bee invited everybody for a party. Now, the frog was the last one tho arrive and the bee said: "To be honest, I don't like so much your dirty hands. Go home and wash your hands before coming to my party." The frog went home and washed his front legs but on his way back he had to use his wet legs to walk, and as a result the legs had become more dirty. The bee laughed at the frog and said that he asked for clean hands and not for hands that are even more dirty. The frog went home again to clean his hands but again they had become more dirty when arriving. When he arrived for the third time he discovered that the party was over and all the food was finished.
Who misled who?

Apart from such simple elements, more complex structures may vary, including story themes. Here we enter the domain of story content, which is the subject of the next sections. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see how themes can serve as building blocks for the format and can be combined to construct new stories. There are many stories in which ancient themes show up. One of clearest examples is a story told by a Baveck woman in Ndjolé. This story starts exactly like the fairy tale Snow-white (see Box 5.2). The vain woman consulting her mirror becomes pregnant and when the beautiful baby is born it is put in a bag and thrown in the river. Here the storyteller may be introducing a biblical element, which she may have heard in the church. The river takes the baby downstream where it is found by fishermen. The baby grows up with the fishermen and is well hidden in a house until the day of a traditional festival (introducing a traditional element) during which children are the centre of attention and receive presents. There the father, who thought his baby was dead, recognises his child and finally kills his wife and takes back his child.

This example may show how easily different story themes may be combined to create a new story. Notably, we may encounter many elements known from fairy tales such as the lost mule of Cinderella or the secret name of Rumpelstiltskin. This may not be surprising given the hypothesis that most of these fairy tales partly have their roots in the ancient Middle Eastern oral tradition of the Arabian nights[3]. Moreover, especially in Central Province of Cameroon we encounter many biblical themes such as the crossing of the Red Sea, or Jonas and the Whale. There are many other story themes that appear in stories time and again. Examples of these themes are a lion cub and human child growing up together in the bush, or a girl who marries a man who appears to be a transformed animal. The 'hyena in a well' story (see box 5.3), which is also known in other countries such as Surinam[4], is very popular in both fieldwork regions. Another theme concerns two brothers: the good and poor brother borrows a goat from the wife of the bad and rich one; the rich brother, however, is a miser and fights with his poor brother. He is finally punished by God and transformed into an animal. A final example is the story about the wicked stepmother. We know this theme from western fairy tales such as Mother Holle but it is probably one of the most common themes that can be found in stories all over the world. Most of the themes mentioned above appear in both the Far North as well as Central Province.

The fact that themes can be mixed and re-integrated to form new stories makes it virtually impossible to trace the real origin of a story. As was discussed in Chapter 2, the present study does not aim to do so. Instead, what counts is the actual existing story realm and the influence stories have on people's thoughts and actions. The fact that most stories have such widespread fame and flexible content only makes them more suitable for general use, including use for environmental communication.

[3] The stories were originally written in Arabic.
[4] Information from a professional storyteller from Surinam: Paul Middellijn.

Box 5.2: Fairy tale
Ndjole, Edith Yatoulo, age 20, female, Baveck.

A woman, very beautiful had a mirror. She was always looking at herself in the mirror. She asked the mirror: "Who is the most beautiful of the village?"
And the mirror answered: "You are the most beautiful."
Every day she asked the mirror: "Who is the most beautiful woman of the village?" and the mirror said: " There is no one that exceeds you, it is you who are the most beautiful."
She became pregnant and asked again the mirror: "Who is the most beautiful woman of the village?" It said: "Ah, you are not anymore, the most beautiful girl will come soon."
She became very angry. She stayed, oooohh, she asked the mirror again. "Who do you say is the most beautiful of the village?" The mirror said: "Ah, the most beautiful will come soon, it is not you anymore, the most beautiful one will come soon."
She gave birth. She continued asking the mirror: "Who is the most beautiful woman of the village?" The mirror answered: "It is that girl there who is the most beautiful. You are not even beautiful anymore. It is that young girl who is the most beautiful." The woman was very angry. She took her baby, she put it in a bag and dropped it in the river. She returned home. Her husband asked her: "Where is the baby?" She answered: "Ah, I went drawing water from the river and then the child fell, the child is dead." The husband stayed very calm.
There were some fishermen. They were fishing and they saw a bag. The bag was floating because when a child is newly born its body does not sink under the water. It stays floating. The fisherman looked at the bag. He said: "Well, well, look, what is this??" He approached the bag with his piroque. He took the bag out of the water and saw the child. The child started crying. He took the child with him and he saw what a .., what a beautiful child it was. He was surprised by seeing such a beautiful creature. He said: "I will raise this child. I will raise this child." He arrived home and went to his friend. "Oh, look, I have found a child, you know. I have found a child in the river." His friend asked: "Oh, show it a while to me." "Oh, what a beautiful child. Let us keep it." They prepared a very beautiful room for it, with a small bed and everything. "The child has to be well nourished. We have to buy everything, milk and all things." So the child stayed in its room, always well nourished.
And in that village there were always festivals for children. Every year there was a children's festival. Year after year. The fisherman said: "I will protect my child very well, if there are children, I will take my baby there, my beautiful baby. I will receive a lot of presents. The festival of the children started. He dressed the little babyyyyy. He dressed the little baby with great care. He took his little child to the place of the festival. He arrived at the place of the festival. People passed by to see his baby. If your baby is beautiful they always give you money and presents. If your child is not beautiful, you stay alone with your child.
The people came, everybody only gave money to the fisherman. He got so many presents and money. The woman who had abandoned the child was also there. She saw that it was her child. She passed by, but she did not give anything. Her husband also passed by. He said: "Ah, is that not my child? The baby here looks like my child. I will ask the man. There is not even a woman, so how can he have a baby? I will first ask him." So the man went to ask the fisherman. He said: "How is it possible for you to have such a beautiful child?" He said: "You know, I am a fisherman. I have found the child in the river, and I took it with me. I have raised it." "Ah!" He asked his wife. "Didn't you say that our child was dead? You are a liar, hé, you are a liar! I will take my baby back." And so he took his child back and beat his wife. Then he killed his wife and stayed alone with his baby. The story ends.

Box 5.3: The hyena in the well (short version)
Dargala: Hawa, age 30, female, peul.

The hyena had fallen into a well and was crying. The squirrel heard the wail and went in search. He found the hyena and asked what had happened. "Please hurry and help me to get out of here before I die of hunger!" The squirrel used his tail and put it into the well. The hyena grasped it and climbed out of the well. When getting out he had thought of eating the squirrel. Just as he wanted to do so, the rabbit passed by and asked what was going on. The squirrel told him that he had helped the hyena to get out of the well and that the hyena now wanted to eat him. The rabbit said: "How can such a small squirrel save a hyena from a well? I don't believe the story. But let's reconstruct the whole event so I can really see what happened. You, hyena, go into the well so the squirrel can show me how he did it."
So the hyena went into the well again, and then the rabbit ran away with his friend the squirrel.

Nevertheless, some stories do exist that particularly pretend to be more authentic than other stories. These stories are of special relevance for the present study because using their elements or making free variations on them for reasons such as environmental communication may confuse audiences or show lack of respect.

The first group of these stories are those that refer to real persons or facts in the past. Especially in Central Province there exist many stories dealing with specific warriors or chiefs. Secondly, some stories are supported by explicit truth claims such as: "this story is really true because I heard it from my father." Truth claim is closely related to authority and as we shall see this will play an important role in the further discussion in this dissertation. Thirdly, some stories are explicitly claimed to belong to one ethnic group. Some aspects do indeed indicate this such as the fact that people only know the story in that language although it is not necessarily their mother tongue. Moreover, some stories start with the words: " This is a Baveck story." Another indication is the fact that some story characters have names that are typical for one ethnic group. Finally, probably the most convincing indication is the occurrence of songs in the story. Since songs are difficult to translate without losing their rhythm, stories may be told in another language than the songs in the story. If the language of the story differs from the song, the language of the song may thus be considered to be more original.

In spite of ownership claims, it should again be noted that there is a big overlap and similarity between stories. Even stories that pretend to be typical of one ethnic group can be found back among different tribes, and even in both research regions, in spite of the distance of 1,200 km.

Concluding this section, it may be noted that stories in Cameroon have many versions and elements of the stories can freely wander around within the storytelling universe. This

justifies the use of stories in an active, intercultural way. Moreover, the creation of new stories or story elements would have stand a good chance of being easily accepted in communication sessions. The only exception to this rule may be to avoid elements that are salient in highly authoritative or non-fictional stories.

5.4 Story content: fictional stories

5.4.1 Different types of fictional stories

Both in the Far North as well as in Central Province, the majority of the stories collected have a fictional character. This means that there are no literal indications or other claims of reality in terms of concrete or mythological references to factual events. As indicated before, this does not preclude that stories may interweave fact and fiction.

If we want to know the impact of stories on human perception and action, the difference between fact and fiction may not be a determining factor. After all, fictional stories may also serve as examples and include lessons for action. Notwithstanding this remark, for practical purposes a distinction is made in this chapter between fictional stories, stories dealing with non-fiction events in recent past and stories dealing with non-fiction events long ago.

In the collection from Central Province, 158 of the 214 stories have a fictional character. In the Far North, 174 of the 241 have a fictional character. On basis of the story characters, these fictional stories may be roughly divided into four types of stories. The stories in which all story characters are represented by animals can be divided in two groups. One is the animal fable. The second consists of the other animal stories. In some cases animals and people appear in the same story. In this third type as well as in the second type, the role of animals is often not to represent a certain human character but most often the literal presence of the animal. An example is the story about birds that destroy the millet field of the sultan. The sultan captures a bird that appears to have no wings. The bird starts to talk and tells a story. In this case the bird is not supposed to represent any human characteristic. The story deals with an imagined situation and tells about the literal human interaction with a bird. Finally, there are stories in which only people play a role.

Table 5.1 presents the distribution of these story types in my samples in both provinces.

Fictional stories	**Far North (n=174)**	**Central Province (n=158)**
Human stories	37	37
Human/ animal stories	71	43
Animal fables	64	72
Other animal stories	2	6

Table 5.1: The four categories of fictional stories, based on story characters, and their occurrence in the two samples

In the further subsections I will discuss the different story types in more detail.

5.4.2 Fictional stories with human characters

This category consists mainly of stories that are similar to fairy tales. Common themes may be distinguished as in European fairy tales. One of the most frequent themes, especially among Moslems, is the theme of the stepmother. Since most families are polygamous it often happens that a child is raised by a woman who is not the natural mother. Also if one of the women dies, parenthood is taken over by one of the co-wives. As in European fairy tales, the co-wife often represents a negative personage that is punished at the end.

Another common theme in stories with human characters concerns the king with his beautiful daughter. In most stories there are many potential suitors who wish to marry the girl. In many stories the girl finally chooses a candidate who is not approved of by the father. Her father forbids her to marry but she is determined. After a conflict, the girl leaves with her husband into the brousse. There she finally discovers her husband to be a wild animal who has temporarily shapeshifted in order to achieve his goal. It should be noted that (strictly speaking) with the introduction of this element, the story is classified in table 5.1 as a human/animal story. The girl finally manages to run away and to return to her father, regretting her disobedience and seeking forgiveness.

Apart from fairy tales there are so-called aetiological stories explaining why certain things are the way they are. An example is a story from Central Province explaining why women have two breasts. However, most aetiological stories are built around animal characters and will therefore be discussed more extensively in section 5.4.3.3.

Although there is much more to say about this category of stories I will not go into further detail because this goes beyond the scope of this research. These stories, or story elements from them, will only be used incidentally in further discussion. Equally, human-animal stories will not be discussed separately here. They will be included in the discussion in the next sections.

5.4.3 Stories about animals

5.4.3.1 General overview of animals in fiction stories

By far the largest part of the stories collected consist of those in which animals play the leading role. Especially in fables, there is a fixed group of animals, each with their own specific character. Table 5.2 shows a list of the animals generally occurring in stories from the Far North and Central Province.

Name of animal in Far North	Equivalent in Central Province	Characteristics.
Squirrel	Hare	Trickster, intelligent, cunning, physically small and weak, wild
Hare	Hare	Trickster, intelligent, cunning, domesticated
Monkey	Monkey	Intelligent, clever, adjudicator
-	Turtle	Quiet and wise, hero
Turtle	-	Slow and lazy
Hyena	Panther	Anti-hero, cowardly, greedy and stupid
Panther	Buffalo	Aggressive and angry
Dog	Dog	Domesticated, link with people, big eater
Lion	Lion	Royal and noble, also arrogant
Elephant	Elephant	Strong and naïve
Snake	-	Cunning
Frog	-	Misleading
Bee	-	Attacking
-	Antelope	Weak, vulnerable
Spider	Spider	Revolutionary[5]
Lizard	Lizard	Lazy and stupid
Chicken	Chicken/ cock	Subtle
Butterfly	-	Liar

Table 5.2: Animals in fictional stories and their specific character

As we can see from Table 5.2 there are many similarities in characteristics between the animals in stories from the Far North and Central Province. Nevertheless there are also some differences of which the most striking one is the turtle. In Central Province the turtle is the symbol of wisdom, always going his own way, always arriving where he wants to be, always relaxed. People say the turtle is never in a hurry because he always carries his house with

[5] In contrast to other cultures where the spider (e.g. Ananse) plays a prominent role, in Cameroon it is only rarely found. When it was found it was considered to be a revolutionary character. It was punished (by God) and now has to live imprisoned in its own web (see story box 22).

him. The turtle always has five attributes in his little bag. To cite a story fragment from Tina Messe Francois in Ndjolé:

The turtle opened his little bag and put his pipe in it, a small amount of tobacco and his cola nut, and everything else he needed without forgetting his gourd of water and his gourd of palm wine.

The turtle is the absolute hero in Central Province but it is almost absent in the stories from the Far North. In the rare cases it is mentioned it is portrayed as a rather negative entity, being slow and lazy, taking advantage of other characters (see for an example Box 5.4). The lack of correspondence between the two provinces also accounts for the anti-hero of Central Province, the panther. Although the panther does occur in stories from the Far North, it is rather a symbol of aggression (corresponding with the buffalo in Central Province). However, the anti-hero from Central Province clearly has its counterpart in the Far North, the hyena.

Box 5.4: A turtle story from the Far North
Kalfou: Yaouba Hamadou, age 19, male, Peul.

One day Coucou the bird invited the turtle for dinner at his house. On the way they had to cross a river. The turtle said: "I cannot eat with you without having taken a bath." Coucou said "Go ahead, you can take a bath." The turtle said: "But the water is very deep. Let's take a rope and fix one end to my foot and the other end to yours." The turtle went into the water. Under water, the turtle unfastened the rope and fixed it to the root of a tree that was in the water. The turtle left the water on the other side and went to the house of Coucou and ate everything there was. He went back into the water and again fastened the rope to his leg. He said to Coucou: "I am ready, you can pull me out of the water now!" They walked together to the house of Coucou but found the house empty. Coucou said to the turtle: "I am so very sorry, a thief must have come in my absence. I will invite you again tomorrow."
The next day, Coucou prepared another meal, with wine and everything. He went looking for the turtle. The turtle said: "I cannot eat without having taken a bath." Coucou said: "Go ahead, you can take your bath. "The turtle said: "But the water is very deep. Let's take a rope and fix it to my foot and to yours." The turtle went into the water. Under water, the turtle unfastened the rope and fixed it to the root of a tree that was in the water. The turtle left the water on the other side, went into the house of Coucou and ate everything there was. He went back into the water and fastened again the rope on his leg. He said to Coucou: "I am ready, you can pull me out of the water now!" They walked together to the house of Coucou but found the house to be empty. This time Coucou had decided to go to a Marabout. The Marabout gave him a statue in the shape of a human being. The statue had glue on it.. He said to Coucou: "Go home, put this in your kitchen and prepare another diner." Coucou prepared the food and then invited the turtle. The turtle went into the water and out again just like before and then went to the house of Coucou. He entered the house of Coucou and started eating. He saw the statue and asked: "What are you doing here?" The statue did not answer and the turtle hit it with his leg. The leg got stuck. The turtle got angry and hit again. Finally all four legs got stuck and the turtle could not go back anymore. Coucou waited endlessly and finally pulled the rope and saw that the turtle was not there anymore. He thought that the turtle did not accept his invitation anymore. He returned home and found the turtle. And so Coucou discovered that the turtle was a thief.

Apart from this general list there are a number of animals that occur occasionally in a specific, smaller region. In the Far North, for example, there are regional differences with regard to water. In the villages that are situated closer to one of the rivers or the Maga lake, such as Zina and Guividig, there are considerably more stories on fish and hippopotamus. At first sight, it is of course not surprising to note that the animals that people talk about in their stories are the ones they see around them.

However, considering this connection between animals in stories and the actual environment we come to a remarkable result when we look at the animals typical of stories in Central Province. In Table 5.3, the occurrence of animals in the stories is presented[6]. We may conclude that the natural habitat of most of the animal characters that occur in these stories is either savannah or a savannah-forest landscape. Although the mosaic landscape in the Central Province is often perceived as degraded tropical forest, none of the story characters lives in the rainforest. The gazelle, although a typical savannah animal, is mentioned only in stories in Central Province and not in stories from the Far North. Moreover, most of the animals listed in Table 5.3 do not occur in the region, at least not nowadays. Some animals, like the snake indicated as boa or python have never occurred in Central Province, and probably not even in Cameroon.

The fact that some animals that do not occur in the region nowadays play a prominent role in stories could be explained by several reasons. It may refer to the situation in the past. This may imply that in the past these animals were present in the region. A second explanation may be that these animals occur in the region where the ethnical group originally comes from. As was explained in chapter 4, the Babouti and Baveck have migrated from the north that is characterised by savannah. The occurrence of specific animals in stories may be an interesting issue that does relate to the environmental discussion. I will come back to this in detail in section 6.4.

In the next section I will discuss the different animal stories in more detail. I will make a distinction between animal fables, aetiological stories and other stories.

[6] It should be noted once more that this list does not have any statistical value since the stories collected are not random. It is just meant to give a general impression of the most common characters in stories.

Far North (n= 137)	**Central Province (n=121)**
Hyena (40)	Turtle (28)
Lion (23)	Hare (25)
Elephant (19)	Lion (24)
Hare (18)	Panther (24)
Birds (18)	Snake (17)
Snake (15)	Bird (14)
Dog (11)	Dog (11)
Squirrel (10)	Buffalo (10)
Monkey (9)	Elephant (10)
Panther (6)	Chimpanzee (10)
Antelope (5)	Antelope (9)
Kob (5)	Crocodile (7)
Goat (5)	Monkey (6)
Cow (5)	Hyena (6)
Vulture (5)	Gazelle (5)
Fish (5)	
Chicken (5)	
Turtle (5)	

Table 5.3: Animal characters in order of occurrence (≥ 5) in fiction stories (Several animals may occur in one story)

5.4.3.2 Animal fables

Fables are characterised by animals that occur as humans or that represent human beings. They talk, think and act like people. If human beings occur in these stories the animals also interact with people in a very natural way. According to Schipper (1985) who has described these stories for many African countries, through these stories people can indirectly blame or judge certain persons without explicitly mentioning the person. It is remarkable that all the animals that show up in the stories are never perfect. They always have a combination of contrasting characteristics, be it strong and stupid, weak and intelligent or beautiful and nasty. Apart from provoking the tension that is indispensable for a story, it may also strongly correspond to the basic feeling people have about real life: you can never have it all. This issue was further discussed in interviews. According to some of the respondents, it is related to the overall mentality of many people in Cameroon characterised by a lack of belief in a world that could be created by ourselves, resulting in resignation with regard to all kinds of

matters; a lack of belief in an ideal. Instead, there is a strong belief in the fate that can only be known by God.

Most of these animal stories centre around the character of the squirrel (Far North) or the hare (both provinces), that deals with the anti-hero: the panther (Central Province) or the hyena (Far North). Considering the reaction of the audience during my fieldwork, these stories have a high entertainment value. They often deal with themes such as mistrust, laziness, gluttony, etc. One prototype story is about a squirrel (or hare) and a hyena (or panther), who are both in love with the same woman. This woman is often the daughter of a chief, so they have court the girl. An example of such a story is given in Box 5.5.

Box 5.5: Hyena and squirrel visiting the chief
Kalfou: Fadimatou Nassouma, age 45, female, Peul.

The hyena and the squirrel went travelling together. They said: "We have to bring some presents for the lamidou." Both filled their bags. The hyena put his sugar cakes into the bag but the squirrel put only carbonic gas (flatus) in it. They left for their journey. Half way the hyena wanted to stop to urinate. He went behind a tree and the squirrel quickly changed both bags. They continued their way. The squirrel said: "Wow, my bag is heavy!" but the hyena did not get the clue. He was just happy that his bag was not so heavy. They arrived at the village and the chief gave them something to eat and drink. He was not too happy with the present of the hyena. He said: "You can sleep here tonight, the squirrel in the chicken shed and the hyena with the sheep." The squirrel said to the hyena: "Tonight if you hear the cry of a chicken you will know I have killed one, and then you have to kill a sheep." The night came. The squirrel took a chicken and pinched it. The chicken cried. The hyena thought that the squirrel had killed it and he killed a sheep. And this went on until the hyena had killed all the sheep but one. Another cry. The hyena put his foot on the last sheep. The next morning, the chief said: "Since you are leaving for a long journey you can take whatever you like from your house. Both had taken their stuff and the hyena discovered that the squirrel had not killed any chicken. They left and the hyena had only a sheep with three legs.
The hyena said: "My sheep does not want to walk." The squirrel said: "You have to cut another leg, then it will go." The hyena did so but the sheep was even worse. The squirrel said: "You have to cut the other legs, then it will walk like a snake." The hyena cut off the legs but it did not work Finally they ate the sheep. The hyena said: "Now I don't have anymore food. We have to eat your chickens. "The squirrel said: "Okay." The day was almost finished and the sun was setting. The squirrel said: "Do you see that red thing over there, that is the fire, go and collect some fire so we can cook. "The hyena left and the squirrel crept into a termite hill. When the hyena came back the squirrel had already cut the meat and put the pieces in the termite hill. The squirrel said: "Put a piece of your tail in the termite hill so I can attach the meat to it." The hyena did so. "A bit more, it is difficult" said the squirrel. The squirrel attached the tail to the root of a tree. Then he took a branch with thorns and pricked the hyena in his backside. The hyena ran away and his tail was cut off. That is why the hyena has a broken tail.

As mentioned by Paulme (1976), these stories often follow a typical narration line. Starting out from a harmonious situation, a problem develops that finally results in a new, less harmonious situation. Many stories start with two animals, like the chimpanzee and the

dog, or the hyena and the dog, who are best and inseparable friends. Then a problem occurs, they quarrel and from then onwards they separate forever.

Although these stories are mainly meant for entertainment, they do always have a hidden educational message too, for example while discussing the protagonists' characters and their consequences. It should be noted, however, that the winner is always the squirrel whose traits are not always fully desirable. This may show that one should in general be very careful in judging good and bad behaviour. Many of the lessons given are practical strategies for surviving a complex world rather than moral standards. In those cases that do deal with morality, this is often highly influenced by religion. For these reasons, lessons in local stories can be different from European moral standards. There are villages in the Far North of Cameroon where, for example, stealing is considered to be a proof of cleverness rather than an unacceptable deed[7]. In spite of these differences, it can be concluded that in most cases the animal stories are supposed to teach you how to behave. This can be clearly seen from the stories that end with a moralistic expression, such as: "and that is why you should always….."

Next to these stories with direct moral lessons there are animal stories that may have other educational values. They will be discussed in the next section.

5.4.3.3 Aetiological stories

This category of stories is characterised by the fact that they explain natural phenomena. They explain, for example, why animals behave the way they do or why they look as they do. Quite often, however, this explanation does not appear to be an attempt to give serious scientific back-up. On the contrary, aetiological stories rather give an indirect and implausible explanation. Therefore, the stories often deal with phenomena that cannot be explained too easily in scientific terms so there is room for inventive explanations. The question, for example, why the kob only give birth to one young is more interesting for an aetiological story than the question why a lion has big teeth. Box 5.6 is an example of an aetiological story that is clearly fictional. Like most of the aetiological stories, this story is rather short and cunning. However, there are also stories like why the sky is far from the earth (Box 5.7) that may be classified as having a more mythical character in the sense that they appear to be more like serious explanations and therefore give meaning or significance to a phenomenon that surpasses the individual level (see the different definitions of myth given in section 2.4).

[7] This was found, for example, during interviews in Moutourwa in 1994.

Box 5.6: Why dogs run after a car
Fadare: Bouba Saidou, age 16, male, Peul.

The dog, the goat and the donkey went for a long journey. On their way back, they were so tired that they decided to take a bush taxi for which they had to pay 500 each.
Arriving home, the donkey paid his 500. The dog only had 1000 which he gave to the driver. The goat saw this and told the driver that it was okay like this. The driver left and the dog said: "Hey, I should have 500 back! Donkey, did you pay? Goat, did you pay?" The donkey said yes, the goat said yes.
From this day on, one can see the typical behaviour when a car passes by. The donkey stays on the road, not afraid of anything since he paid. The goat always flees on seeing a car, being afraid that he still has to pay. The dog always runs after a car, barking and still looking for his money.

As with all stories, the difference between reality and fiction is not always clear. I will come back to this issue in Chapter 6. Although purely mythical explanations do occur in stories and the distinction is not always clear, the stories I refer to in this section are more related to the fictional animal stories. In section 5.6 I will discuss some stories that belong more clearly to the mythical category.

Box 5.7: Why the sky is far away from the earth
Fadare: Kekamla Madandi, age 47, male, Tupuri.

In the beginning the sky and the earth were together. When the women were pounding the millet, they always hit the sky with their masher. The sky said: “Oh, that hurts, stop doing that.” But the woman said: “No, how can I stop, I have to prepare the millet for my husband.” This went on and on. One day the sky was sick of this and decided to leave. He was very angry and took away the fish that were laying on the ground ready to get cooked. From that day on the sky is very far from the earth. There are fish living in the sky river and every time it rains, this river overflows and fish fall from the sky. If you look at the full moon you can still see the silhouette of the pounding woman with a child on her back.

Aetiological stories can also occur as episodes within longer animal fables mentioned in the previous subsection. As is the case in longer stories, many explanations of natural phenomena are based on the principle that there was a harmonious situation, then a conflict occurred which led to the new situation including the phenomenon having to be explained.

Table 5.4 gives a list of the aetiological stories found in the Far North and Central Province[8].

[8] Aetiological stories are not limited to animal stories. There are also aetiological stories that deal merely with human characters. An example is the story in the Central Province explaining why women have two breasts.

Contrary to mythological stories, the main intention of aetiological stories is not to really inform the listener about the cause of the phenomena. They rather deal with the outcome, for which the explanation is merely an aid to remember it by. For this reason, there exist many versions explaining the same phenomenon. The tail of the hyena, for example, is cut off in many different stories telling about the adventures of the hyena. The head of the Egyptian vulture is partly white because, according to one story, he was once a human being who was wasting milk and got punished for it. God transformed him into a vulture and the white colour reminds us of the milk. According to another story, the white head is due to the fact that the vulture was busy painting himself white in order to be different from the other birds. Whilst painting he was interrupted and since then the job has remained unfinished.

Aetiological stories in the Far North	**Aetiological stories in Central Province**
Why the bat has its head down	Why camels have torn lips
Why camels have torn lips	Why chimpanzees (or gorillas) live in the forest
Why the chicken and the guinea fowl don't like each other	Why crabs have a flat back
Why kobs only give birth to one child	Why elephants do not have a bigger bird on their back
Why dogs run after a car	Why hyenas have their tails cut off
Why elephants are afraid of chickens	Why the owl is the chief of the birds
Why elephants eat millet	Why snakes bite people
Why elephants are intelligent	Why some animals don't pay tax
Why elephants only give birth to one child	Why some vultures have a white head
Why hyenas have their tails cut off	
Why the lizard nods	
Why lions attack villages	
Why lions hunt antelopes	
Why the owl is the chief of the birds	
Why the sky is far away from the earth	
Why some vultures have a white head	
Why wild animals exist	

Table 5.4: Aetiological stories in the Far North and Central Province

With respect to what I call 'the outcome', aetiological stories have two educational levels. First of all, as has been said, they often deal with factual observations that may not always be commonly known. It should be remarked that this level of education, *i.e.* providing

the listener with facts and information, occurs in practically all stories. It is amazing to see how stories use all kinds of knowledge about the environment. In a story from Nguila, the turtle wants to prevent an antelope that has been caught in a trap from being eaten by the lion and achieves this by rubbing the antelope with the leaves of the Margarite tree[9]. The audience is told that these leaves are bitter so the lion does not like the antelope anymore. In another story from Pette and Mindif, animals paint themselves red with the bark of the *Acasia seyal* to simulate bleeding. In this example information is given about the specific qualities of the bark, which may be useful for people in daily life.

Secondly, there are stories that give information about local categorisations. In the Far North there is a story about why the bat flies with his head down. This story has the same educational value as the story in Central Province about the animals that do not pay tax: it gives insight into local taxonomy. The story about the bat describes the situation of a bat that is ill and seeks help. He first goes to what is indicated in the story as 'the animals' ('les animaux' in French) but they refuse to help because they believe he is a bird, having wings and flying. So then he goes to the birds but the birds refuse to help because he has hair and legs and is rather like an animal. This is why the bat is still ill and flies with his head down. The story about the tax is similar: it deals with animals that live in the water as well as on the land. They do not pay tax because they are neither animal nor fish. Both cases indicate the clear distinction made between animals, fish and birds. Interestingly, the category of animals, although indicated as such, rather refers to mammals. Another example is the story about the origin of wild animals. It deals with the distinction that is locally made between domesticated and wild animals. Local taxonomy can be seen as part of what is called folkbiology (Medin & Atran, 1999). Other elements of folkbiology can also be found in stories. These will be discussed in the next section.

Although the cause of the phenomenon described in the stories is often implausible, and therefore not providing proper knowledge, it does have another educational function. The type of explanation given often refers to hidden norms and values. Here it links up with the stories discussed in the former section. However, the moral lesson is not directly expressed but represented by a commonly perceived phenomenon, such as the features of an animal. The origin of the phenomenon that the story explains at the same time confirms the explanation. It reminds you, as it were, of these norms and values. To give an example, the torn lips of the camel are caused by its own arrogance. Every time you see the image of the animal, you may remember the story and be reminded of the moral implication of the story: the story explains that you should not be arrogant. This normative aspect is notably present in most aetiological stories dealing with animal and man. Interestingly, in spite of the variation in the plot line, all these stories have one thing in common, that it is the fault of people that animals are now causing a problem for humans. Since this refers to norms about human

[9] The Latin name is unkwown to me but it was also decribed as : la petite marguerite ou la paquerette est une petite plante blanche de regions temperées à fleurs blanches ou rose.

behaviour, these stories will be further discussed with respect to environmental elements in the chapter 6.

5.4.3.4 Other animal stories

Next to fables and aetiological stories there is another category of animal stories. Generally, these stories are also supposed to have a high educational value. Consequently, these stories are often told to children. It is remarkable, however, that during fieldwork many adults also listened to the stories and enjoyed them, confessing that they were of educational value to them. I will mention a few of these story-types here.

First, there are stories in which a number of animals appear in a situation where they have to express themselves in their natural voice. Here the basic goal is, according to the storytellers, to teach children the name of the animals and their accompanying sounds.

Second, there are stories with a game element to them. These stories are like exercises. They usually end with a question through which the audience is asked reconstruct a sequence of cause and effect. Box 5.8 gives an example of such a story that was recorded both in the Far North and in Central Province with slight differences between the two versions.

Box 5.8: Cause and effect chain
Fadare: Animatou Dona, age 70, female, Peul.

Do you know flies? Do you know those little pimples? Well a fly had a pimple on his cheek. A herb hurt the pimple so the pus came out, right in the eye of a snake. The snake fled into the tree. The tree fell down right on a turtle. The turtle exploded and set the bush on fire. The rain had fallen down to put out the fire. The ants came out of the wet ground, the Egyptian vulture had eaten all the ants but one. That ant complained to the chief that the vulture had eaten all his brothers. The chief had to solve the problem so what should he do?

Version in Ndjole: Essom Ambara Edouari, age 25, male, Baveck.
The fly finds a Boa constrictor that was sitting in the sun. He enters into the body. The snake flees and enters into the hole of a mole. The mole runs away into a tree and starts shouting. A boar thinks it is the dog of the hunter and flees into the river. The river overflows and the ants come out of the ground. The Egyptian vulture had eaten all the ants but one. That ant complained to the chief that the vulture had eaten all his brothers. The chief had to solve the problem so what should he do?

Third, related to these cause and effect stories are stories that deal with the foodchain. In a lovely story from the Far North the squirrel wants to marry the beautiful daughter of the sultan. However, the price asked for the bride is the skin of a lion. So how would the squirrel be able to kill a lion? In order to get the lion to come to his house, the squirrel decides to organise a party. He invites the lion by promising that the dog will be there too. Attracted by

the idea of eating the dog, the lion decides to go to the party. In order to get the dog to his party the squirrel promises the dog that the chicken will be there too. In order to get the chicken to his party, he promises the chicken that the worm will be there as well. So the squirrel starts by inviting the worm, telling him that he has organised a big party in honour of this small animal. The worm comes first but then the chicken arrives and eats the worm; then the dog arrives and eats the chicken; finally the lion eats the dog. Then the squirrel uses a trick that is often told in stories. He invites the lion to take a rest on the mat. The mat, however, is just covering a hole with smouldering ashes. The lion falls in the hole and is burned. The squirrel takes his skin and offers it to the sultan.

Fourth, in addition to the foodchain concept, another biological theme that is discussed in stories is the idea of kinship between animal species and the possibility of one species descending from another. Although among the Muslims and Christians most people believe that animals are created by God, some animals were not brought into being in the first phase of creation, but in a later phase. In the Far North several story versions were heard about a mother giving birth to a number of children. The first children are all warthogs. They have a happy life until suddenly the mother gives birth to an elephant. The enormous animal threatens the warthogs. When the mother becomes pregnant again, the children are afraid that 'the baby' is going to be even more monstrous. So they decide to interrupt the pregnancy. In order to do so, they lead the mother to the riverside and finally throw her into the water. Because of the shock the woman gives birth immediately. The foetus, however, is not fully developed. It nevertheless manages to survive in the water. This is the first hippopotamus.

No matter whether this sort of evolution is believed to be a biological fact or not, the story at least indicates a locally perceived kinship between warthogs, elephants and hippopotamus. This is probably based on features like the skin and the colour.

There is another category of animals, including elephants and monkeys, that are said to be descended from humans. In these stories people have done something wrong and are punished by God. God has turned people into monkeys because they worked on a holy day. Similarly, God has turned a woman into an elephant because she did not obey her husband, or turned a man into an elephant because he did not help his poor brother. This is why, according to the storytellers, a monkey and an elephant are so intelligent and behave very much like humans.

Here again, it is difficult to know whether these transformation stories are considered to be fiction or non-fiction. In fact, it touches upon a realm of stories that talk about shape-shifting from human into animals and the other way around. Since it is embedded, at least in many cases, in a wider belief in what I call for the moment super-natural powers, they have (at least to a certain extent) a value of reality for people. That is why I discuss them further in the section 5.5.3 which deals with stories that are considered to be based on real facts, in other words stories that are considered to be non-fiction.

The category of non-fiction stories can be divided into historical stories that deal with events that happened at a certain moment in the past and mythological stories referring to an undefined moment, long ago.

5.5 Historical stories

5.5.1 What makes a story into history

In spite of the local categorisation between *talol* and *taria* or between *nkanna* and *nlan,* the difference between fiction and non-fiction is far from clear. Moreover, there are many cases in which a story can elicit different reaction among the audience. Take for example the aetiological stories discussed in 5.4.3. Explanations are sometimes considered to be just funny inventions, and sometimes they are considered to be absolutely true.

In spite of the undefined and vague line between the two categories, there are some elements that make a story more likely to be seen as non-fiction. In this subsection I will discuss some of these.

In the first place, of course, the storyteller may indicate the type of story by announcing that he is going to tell a *taria,* a *s'aa* or a *nlan*. However, this is rarely done and there are supposed to be other indications in a story, making it superfluous to mention the category[10].

In the first place, there are stories that deal with events in the near past. These events can be verified and confirmed by living persons, including sometimes the storyteller himself. The simplest example is a story about what happened to the storyteller yesterday or last week. Other stories start with non-narrative sentences such as: "This is a story from my grandfather, he has seen it with his own eyes." Referring to authorities, *i.e*. elder people or heroes, the credibility of a story is enhanced.

Non-narrative sentences can also be used later on in the story. For example by using sentences like: "This is really true because…" Furthermore, they can be used as concluding sentences like: "I told you this because it is the truth."

Facts become less verifiable in stories that go back further in time. Finally it ends up in the realm of myths, which will be discussed in section 5.6. In spite of the difficulty of verifying stories that talk about events in the past, they are generally considered to be true. The truthfulness of a story can be improved by using real historical names of persons and places as well as by indicating a specific time. In Central Province especially there are a lot of stories about the history of a group of people or a village. Since these historical stories are forming an important genre they will be discussed separately in the next section.

[10] this is in contrast to the difference between nkanna and panapo in the Central Province which is often mentioned.

5.5.2 Historical stories of the village

In this section I will give some examples of stories that relate some important periods in the history of a village. Most of these stories are related to an important war in which some heroes play a crucial role. In the Far North this often refers to the invasion of nomadic groups. In Central Province it refers first to the Islamic war and later to the colonisation by the Germans.

Remarkable for almost all these stories is that they have a super-natural element of power in them. Some relics of this power are still visible in the world today. This includes the presence of some holy places, holy trees or holy animals. The holy animals (and sometimes the trees) are locally called *totems*. For a theoretical discussion on totemism, see Section 4.6.

In this subsection I will discuss two examples of historical stories that are interesting for the subject of this dissertation: one from Zina in the Far North and one from Nguila in Central Province. The story from Zina as presented here is a composition from different versions that supplemented each other. As we shall see, in both examples the totem animal plays a crucial role.

An historical story about Zina.

The story tells of how the first settlers of Zina found a giant monitor lizard in their garden. Surprisingly, the giant monitor lizard was not scared at all, so he stayed with the ancestors and became domesticated. They fed him with water, red millet and honey. Around 1900 there was a war, called the war of *Rabah*[11]. During that war, Zina was seriously attacked. The villagers did not know what to do and finally they went to see the giant monitor lizard. They prepared a sacrifice and kneeled three times in front of the hole where he lived. Finally, the lizard came out of the hole, together with his young, and ate the food. The next morning the giant monitor lizard jumped on to the wall that was built to serve as a defence around Zina. There he lifted his tail and transformed into a sort of turbulent wind that attacked the enemies and finally chased them away. Since that day, the people of Zina worship the totem of Zina, called *Daada Zina* (the mother of Zina). Every year, the family that lives in the house of the first inhabitants brings a sacrifice to the hole were the lizard lived. Some claim the lizard (or its offspring) is still living there. In 1960, during a political war, however, the people from Zina did not have time to bring a sacrifice to the giant monitor lizard. Consequently, at least according to the informants, Zina was burned and the people had to leave their village. The giant monitor lizard also left. He only came back in 1970.

[11] The legendary Rabah, born in Sudan, was the only one who temporarily interrupted the Kotoko hegemony in the area between 1893 and 1900. He wanted to found an Arabic empire. With the help of the Shoa Arabs he managed to take over the power of the sultan. In 1900, however, he was defeated by the French colonists in the battle of Fort Foureau (Van Est, 1999).

This story explains why all inhabitants of Zina vowed never to kill a domesticated giant monitor lizard. Some emphasise the distinction between the domesticated and the wild giant monitor lizard, the latter to be recognised by a white colour and a shorter tail. There is, however, a lot of confusion between both types, and to avoid risks, people prefer not to kill any giant monitor lizard. According to the villagers, the giant monitor lizard should always be treated respectfully. To illustrate this: once a fisherman from Zina met a giant monitor lizard that begged for some fish. The man refused. Some time later, the lizard came together with some other lizards and attacked the boat. The man lost his fish and his boat sank.

An historical story about Nguila

In Box 5.9 the extensive story about the history of Nguila is presented as told by the chief of Nguila. As with the story of Zina, this story explains how the Babouti got their totem, in this case the panther, and why they never eat the meat of the panther.

In a different version of this story the younger brother again manages first to get the remedy out of the mouth of the panther. Then the elder brother gets a second chance to show his bravery. He finally manages, but the remedy he got did not help him to win the war but improved his hunting capacities. Through the elder brother, who became a chief in another village called Linté, all descendants from Linté are big hunters. The younger brother was the one who finally founded Nguila.

With respect to the non-fiction value of the story it is interesting to note that the bag with the remedy in it is still kept in Nguila. According to the same informant:

It still exists and is called 'Dun' in Babouti. It is stored in a little hut where we light a fire every day. It moves all by itself. It is here, it is tied, a bag with a lot of little bags inside. If you unfasten it without permission, you will never be able to replace it. It is impossible. Inside there are parts of a boa, a lion, a panther, and the physiognomy of all the bad things with the tree bark. We do not know, only the old lady knows. In Linté there is one, here there is one. There is always a guard. If it is angry it moves like a person that is angry and then you know there is something wrong. Sometimes a prince dies and then we hear the voice of a person on his tomb. To hunt we take the bag, we take a bit of powder that we put between our eyes before we go hunting. For the war, the chief takes the whole bag and ties it on his back, just like his second man. They are there, side by side. The bag will never be empty. It will always exist. It will never be replaced. The bag hangs in a house and there is a fire under it. During the war everybody went into the forest and thereafter everybody went up the mountain, Midjim, to wait for the Moslems. Moslems had a lot of grisgris *but they lost and they ran away.*

These stories about specific periods in the history flow over easily into mythological stories. Especially because the events took place at a time before most of the local people today were born. Due to the lack of first-hand knowledge, there is a lot of disagreement about the real version of the history; this confirms that the story is considered to be the truth.

Box 5.9: history of Nguila
Nguila: Gomtsé Choaibou, age 33, male, Babouti.

Our ancestors were two big hunters: Gan and Nemgan who lived in a Babouti village called Bengan that is situated in the Yoko district. They lived in that village Bengan and they were the nephews of the chief. In that village, at the cemetery of the chief there was a colony of bees. When someone cleaned the cemetery and was stung by the bees this meant he would soon become a chief. But neither he nor his brother could become a chief because they were just hunters. When they cleaned the cemetery, however, they were stung by the bees. The chief said that they were the sons of his wife. Why did the bees sting them? After all, in the Babouti culture the chief is followed up by the children of his sister instead of his wife.
But the bees did not sting without reason because next to the cemetery there lived an old lady. The old lady was already very tired. Every time the boys were cleaning the cemetery they brought some food to the old woman. One day when her house had fallen down they built a new one for her. They took her bucket and looked for water. They cut the wood and then left to go hunting. When they came back they had killed some animals. They left a big piece of meat for the woman before returning to their village.
The old lady had decided to give them a present. "For all this effort, what am I going to give you? Come to see me tomorrow morning very early" , she said.
So the early next morning the boys came to her house. When they had arrived, the woman gave them the remedy. She said that with this remedy they would become chief of the village, and the next time when they came to clean the cemetery they should first rub the remedy and see how the people run away. So the lady said: " Come again tomorrow." I will show you another remedy, and the place where you are going to get it.
The next morning the woman asked the eldest brother, Gan, to go and look for the remedy in a certain place. The eldest went looking for it. But he only found a panther lying under a baobab tree with foam at his mouth. The eldest realised that he would be killed if he tried to come close. So the little brother came. He also found the panther with the foam. He thought to himself that he should kill the panther with his lance but the panther said; "No, do not kill me. Come and take it." So the little brother put his hand into the mouth of the panther and took out of it a piece of bark. The name of the tree the bark comes from is 'Goum'. So they mixed the bark with the first remedy that the woman had given them. The day they had to clean the cemetery again they took the bark and together with the first remedy they rubbed it. They came to the cemetery and asked what was happening there. Everybody ran away. So the chief said: "Because you were stung by these bees you want to frighten us? Get out of this village!" So they had to leave the village. They walked and started a war with other villages until they could settle down in another village. They shared the village and the elder brother told his younger brother to go and conquer the Sanaga tribe. Their idea was to fight until they conquered the sea. The younger brother conquered everything up to the land of Nguila. He was very close to Yaounde. Then they heard that the Germans have arrived and they had to stop. That is why we do not eat panther. It is the panther who gave us the remedy to win the war.

5.5.3 Stories about people-nature transformations and witchcraft

As has become clear from stories that have been discussed earlier, there are many examples in which there is a direct physical relationship between humans and nature, especially animals.

All over Cameroon, people perceive the boundaries between human beings and animals as being diffused. There are many situations in which animals transform into humans and the other way around. There are several stories describing different situations in which such transformations take place. These will be discussed in this section.

As has been explained in section 4.6, there is the phenomenon of what is called *waylourou* in the Far North. A *waylourou* is a human being who is able to transform himself into an animal, mostly a dangerous one, like an elephant, a hyena or a lion. In stories, these *waylourous* often transform in the night, although according to the same informants transformation during the day can occur. A Fulbe herder testified about his experience of seeing the transformation through a kind of tornado.

"I once saw a man who transformed into a hyena. I saw a man walking at distance and suddenly there was a whirlwind causing a lot of dust in the air. When the sight became clear again, I saw the hyena running away. It happened at night, it always does so because waylourous *cannot stand the light. It makes them transforming back into human beings again."*

The transformation into an animal can have different purposes. Most often the *waylourou* animal has a certain mission to accomplish, usually harming another person. There are numerous stories about elephants suddenly appearing in a village and destroying a field of working villagers, or lions killing the livestock. I will mention one example here. This is a common story that is even heard in Yaounde, about a former minister of Cameroon who had been a sub-prefect in Moutourwa[12]. The story tells of a group of Fulbe nomads that used to occupy a certain piece of pasture land during part of the year. In the dry season of 1996, however, they found their camp converted into cotton fields. In the conflict that arose between the nomads and the farmers, the sub-prefect finally decided that the nomads had to move. The nomads did so but not without warning that the sub-prefect would seriously regret his decision. Only two weeks later an enormous herd of elephants entered the village and destroyed the millet field of the family of the sub-prefect. The explanation was simple. Nobody doubts the fact that these elephants were *waylourous*, in this case the shapeshifted pastoralists who were taking their revenge.

This story illustrates that the idea of shapeshifting is not limited to the individual level. Quite the contrary, as indicated by many authors (see for examples Knight, 2000) shapeshifting can be highly political. In this case the example story is clearly related to local

[12] Moutourwa is situated about 100 km south of Maroua.

land-use conflicts in the Far North (Van der Ploeg, 2001). I will return to this in more detail in section 6.4.3.

The phenomenon of *waylourous* is part of a wider concept of witchcraft. As has been discussed in section 4.6, this also includes other phenomena such as the witch birds. In this section I will specifically focus on a type of story that frequently occurs in both the Far North as well as Central Province. These stories deal with the origin of this form of witchcraft.

According to a story in Central Province, it started with a small animal living in the forest a long time ago. It had the shape of a lizard and fed itself with the blood of other creatures, by entering the body in a mysterious way. After sucking the blood the victim died. One day, a woman discovered the dead body of an animal. When she saw the small lizard coming out of the body she got very curious and started talking to him. Finally, the animal entered the body of the woman. From that day on he needs to get fed, and the spirit of the woman has to wander through the night to look for blood. When she gives birth to a child, the animals also multiply inside and all the children have to feed their animal. That is how witchcraft started.

Many stories about the origin relate this type of witchcraft power to God. For most Fulbe it is a general curse related to disobedience as described in the pure Islam (see 4.6). In the Far North, there is a story that tells that in former times God forbade people to look in a particular water hole. One day, a group passed the waterhole and in spite of the words of God, the last person in the group looked in the hole. Immediately afterwards, a great flock of birds that appeared to live in the hole flew up and entered into the bodies of these people. The narrator added that they know this is true because one day some people caught a witch-bird and opened its stomach. Inside they found attributes, such as knives, typically belonging to these people.

Another story tells that God has created witchcraft in order to stop the war:

Another time in a village there was a tribal war. It was a war that had caused several deaths. The third day there appeared some small birds that produced light while flying. The birds entered into the stomachs of the warriors, either through the sex organs or through the anus. And as soon as the birds came out again the person died. This continued until the day the war stopped. And after that war the people started using these birds to practise witchcraft and to sell it. But the one who buys witchcraft is dangerous, because once he has got it he will die when the bird leaves him.

5.6 Mythological stories

5.6.1 Characteristics of myths

Although neither in the Far North nor in Central Province is there a specific name for myth, I think it is important to mention it as a separate category. To define a myth we have to refer back to the authors mentioned in section 2.4. The stories that will be discussed in the present

section, however, are called mythological stories by simply using the definition that they are neither fictional tales nor non-fiction stories. With the exception of the stories about the end of the world, they all deal with events in the past that are explained in a story but that can never be proven to have actually happened. Actually, they do not need to be proven. There is simply no discussion about it since it belongs to the realm of beliefs and symbolism. In contrast to historical stories, these stories do not mention concrete persons or concrete time indications in the past. On the contrary, it does not regard the level of an individual person and it deals with a fictional point in the past from where it started and before which there is no information. Myths often contain shared knowledge and many versions of the same story can be found back. Like many myths do, most of the stories that I want to discuss here deal with the origin of something. They have religious or sacred elements in them, and are sometimes related to rituals.

The fact that myths are not a clear separate category has already been stated in the example of an aetiological story explaining why the sky is far away from the earth (Box 5.7). It deals with an action in the undefined past, and it is not clear whether it is just an invented humourous explanation or whether it is considered to be mythical. A strong indication for the latter is that the story appears to link up with the notion that is typical for West Africa that the original world is without separation (Luning, 1991). Luning (p.20-21) reports on several myths about the separation of the sky from the earth told by the Bambara, the Dogon and the Mossi in Mali. An interesting difference between these stories and the story in Box 5.7 is that in the versions mentioned by Luning the conflict of mankind with God (as a result of disobedience to his rules) is always the central reason for the separation, whereas in the story in Box 5.7 there is no God, and vengeance comes directly from the sky.

Another reason why this apparently 'light' story proved to have more impact became clear when talking further with the storyteller. The fact that the sky took away the fish explains the common belief shared by many people from the Far North that fish fall from the sky when it rains. This belief is often supported by the observation that in the beginning of the rainy season, many fish suddenly show up in new pools formed by the rain[13]. The aetiological story about the retreating sky may thus play the role of a myth, explaining an aspect of life by referring to a general event in an undefined past. It should be remarked that whether a myth or not, the phenomenon of falling fish is part of a general belief that might have consequences for environmental actions. I will return to this in the chapter 6.

In the next sections I will present some examples of myths found in Cameroon. I will first discuss the case of the crossing of the Sanaga since this story appears at first sight to be a good example of a specific historical story that has adopted many mythological elements.

Secondly, I will focus on stories that deal with the origin of the world. Here I will also touch upon the tradition of the *Mvet*. Although it is not typical for any of the groups among

[13] Here it concerns species that bury themselves in the ground during the dry season, in particular the silurid *Clarias spp.* Also mentioned were *Tilapia spp, Alestus nurse, Barbus spp.* and *Petersius spp* (Zwaal, 1997).

whom I did my research, it is a very widespread and old initiation in the southern provinces of Cameroon and it may thus have had its influences on many other stories. Whilst looking at stories about the origin of the world we should also consider stories about the end of the world, so-called eschatologies. Both category of story may provide insight into the way time and future are perceived.

Finally I want to discuss mythological stories related to space, *i.e*. the symbolic meaning that is given to environmental features such as landmarks in stories.

5.6.2 The crossing of the Sanaga

In section 4.3 it has been explained that a number of ethnic groups have migrated to the south. While doing so, they had to cross the Sanaga river. Although this crossing has taken place at a time that could potentially be identified, it is not at all sure what actually happened at that moment. Moreover, in many versions of the story the name of the Sanaga is not even mentioned. Instead, the name 'Yom' is often used which refers, according to the people, to a symbolic river one has to cross. As I will try to show, this story which is widely taught in primary schools all over Cameroon, may be more likened to a myth than to a simple historical story.

The main character of this story is the snake. Upon arriving at the border of the river, a chief of one of the clans called the snake. He came out and unrolled himself, forming a bridge that supported thousands of people that walked on it from one side to the other. According to the story one of the chiefs accidentally stung the snake with his spear or staff. The snake immediately rolled up and disappeared. Some people fell into the water and drowned. The people that still had to cross were forced to stay on the north side of the river.

The story explains the origin of two groups of people: the people from the north who are Muslim. They are the ones that could not cross and were finally converted to Islam. The people from the south escaped from Islam but were later converted to Christianity. There is, however, a lot of confusion about the ethnic groups that actually crossed. Especially because after the Germans built their bridges migration still continued. The largest of ethnic groups that has crossed is the Beti. All Beti consider the snake to be a totem for them.

The most prominent disagreement in the different versions concerns the chief who called the snake and the one who in the end chased the snake away. There are many different names used. Not surprisingly, many storytellers claim the hero originally to be from his own ethnic group, whereas the anti-hero that stung the snake is supposed to belong to another (probably less preferred) group. In this way the story is connected to the origin of power relationships between certain ethnic groups.

The many versions of this story could be one indication of the mythical character of the story. After all, if it were merely a description of the history of the area it would have been easier to trace the facts. And if it were only a fiction story, there would not be so many competing variants. Another indication is the presence of the snake. Apart from the fact that

it is very unlikely that a snake physically acted as a bridge for people, it should be taken into consideration that the snake plays a metaphorical role in many myths and initiation stories. Interestingly, there are other stories in which a snake forms a bridge over a river. I refer, for example, to Goethe's fairy tale: "*The green snake and the beautiful lily*". Moreover, the story also appears in the initiation tradition from South Cameroon, the *Mvet*. In this story, the snake also forms the bridge between north and south. It should be noted, however, that here, north and south symbolize the land of mortality and immortality, respectively. Crossing the river could be compared to the process of attaining the state of enlightenment.

Finally, another indication that this story should be understood symbolically rather than historically is found in the fact that there are many other stories from the south deal with the crossing of the river. One example is a story about the crossing of the Yom by birds (see Box 5.10). These birds should, of course, normally be able to fly to the other side. The crossing that is mentioned here is thus more likely to be symbolic.

The crossing of the Sanaga could thus be considered to be a myth. The river symbolises a boundary between two opposite worlds: Islam/Christianity, theirs/ours, bad/good, or mortal/immortal.

5.6.3 Stories about creation

Three kinds of stories about origin of the world were found in Cameroon[14].

Firstly, all over Cameroon there are versions of the Bible or the Koran, about God creating the universe. I will not discuss these further here.

Secondly, there exist a number of stories from which it is difficult to distinguish whether they are considered to be mythical. Here we enter the area of some of the aetiological stories mentioned in section 5.4.3.3. Some of these stories deal with subjects about the creation of certain aspects of life, including the formation of some celestial bodies. Both in Central Province and in the Far North there are stories about the sun and the moon, fighting for power in the sky. I would also mention again the story in Box 5.7 explaining the position of the earth and the sky.

The third type of story dealing with the creation of the world consists of stories that are embedded in sacred traditions, only accessible to certain people. As explained before no specific research was done on these traditions. Nevertheless, one tradition, the *Mvet*, was found that contains a typical creation story. Since it may be interesting to compare it with known traditions (such as the first type of creation stories) and since the *Mvet* is one of the important story traditions in south Cameroon it will be briefly discussed here.

[14] See for creation stories in Africa Schipper (1980).

Box 5.10: The crossing of the Sanaga by birds
Ndjolé, Ambara Martin, age 43, male, Baveck.

The animals lived in perfect harmony. They were used to bathing themselves in the river. The river was called Yom (Sanaga). One day thus, tired of his big head that he was carrying, very ugly with his great big eyes, the owl decided to change his head for that of the dove. When washing the birds would take off their heads, put them aside and go into the water. The owl was the first to get out of the water again. He took the head of the dove. All the animals now came to take their heads. Only the dove could not find his head. He said: "I am looking for my head, I cannot find it." During all this time the owl had hidden his head. So they went to the clairvoyant who said: "in order to retrieve the head of the dove all the animals must cross the river and the spirit of the river will judge who has taken the head of the dove." So they slung a rope above the river from one side to the other, and had to cross the river while singing the song that we will sing in a moment. The animals agreed, and the birds started to walk across on the rope. They started with the gendarme bird, he climbed on to the rope and started to sing:

Who has taken the head of the dove - *sullivan*
Who then has taken the head of the dove - *sullivan*
The dove is the sun of Bela - *sullivan*
Bela who is my mother - *sullivan*
The dove is the son of Bela - *sullivan*
Bela is my mother - *sullivan*
So the dove is my brother - *sullivan*
If it is me who took the head, let me fall into the water - *sullivan*
If it is not me who took the head let me get to the other side of the Sanaga

And suddenly the gendarme bird was at the other side of the Sanaga.
And so it went on. It was the turn of the nightingale (repeat of the song)
All the birds crossed except the owl. So the owl with his deep voice had to climb the rope and sing (repeat song with deep voice). When he crossed the river, the water started to rise bit by bit, the water started to rise bit by bit. But the owl kept on singing (repeat song). Before he had finished singing the river had risen and swept away the owl. Some seconds later he was at the riverbank where they asked him to return the head. He gave it back and had to keep with his big head and big eyes. That is how the story ends.

Mvet

The word *Mvet* literally means sound. It refers in the first place to the traditional instrument that accompanies the storyteller (see figure 5.1). But *Mvet* also refers to the tradition itself, being a mix of philosophy, cosmology and psychology. For an extended study on the *Mvet* I would like to refer to the work of Eno Belinga (1996), who has studied contemporary *Mvet* storytellers. In his book *Moneblum*, Eno Belinga describes the *Mvet* as a tradition originally coming from the region of the Upper Nile, and closely related to Greek traditions.

The *Mvet* story about the creation of the world has the form of a geneaology, starting with the formless and infinite beginning *Eyo'o.* This version is based on the version described by Eno Belinga.

Eyo'o generates Ngôs, the rudimentary element.
Ngôs forms Aki, the egg with four aspects. This egg comes down from the sky until touching the water and floating on it.
Then Aki generates a cloud of blood called Minkur that spreads out and so creates space: Biyemeyema.
In the space Yop, the sun is formed that in its turn generates the light radiation called Bikoko.
When radiating, the sun empties itself and the ensuing darkness generates a hunger for light, called Ngbwa. This Ngbwa is what is commonly called: love.
Love creates beauty since everything made from love is beautiful. This beauty, however, somehow turns into its contrary and generates a fall, in the sense of death: Ekokomo. This fall generates the teller of truth, Nkpwa who finally creates the bearer of truth: Mebege.
Mebege has four sons, who are the forefathers of the big human races.

Most of the *Mvet* stories focus on two human groups, both sons of Mebege: the mortals, called Oku, coming from the north, and the immortals, the Ekan, coming from the south.

5.6.4 End-of-the-world stories[15]

End-of-the-world stories, also called eschatologies (Van Beek, 2000), occur both in Central Province and in the Far North. The presence of such stories is in itself remarkable since these stories are considered to be rare in African cultures (Van Beek 2000). In the Far North there is even a specific word for end-of-the-world: *darngal*. As with the creation stories, many of them are inspired by either Islam or Christian religion. In Box 5.11 an example is given of a typical end-of -the world story in the Far North. Remarkably, this story tells about the end in a very matter of fact way. It merely describes the process without any emotion or personal involvement. As such it does not fit into the two categories of eschatologies as distinguished by Van Beek (2000): apocalyptic futures or futures gradually fading away. Indeed the story in Box 5.11 contains some apocalyptic elements, such as sudden deaths, huge rainfall and wind. As Van Beek mentions for apocalyptic Zoroastrian and Christian tales, also in this story the earth ends without mountains, becoming a bare plain. Interestingly, the story ends with a reflection on the nothingness of the world for Allah[16].

[15] A more extended version of this section is published as an article (Zwaal, 2002).
[16] This corresponds with the story from the Aztec culture, mentioned by Van Beek (2000), in which the earth is nothing more than a playground of the gods.

Box 5.11: End-of-the-world story
Pette: Djitatou Oumarou, age 40, female, Peul.

When the darngal comes, all people will die at once and the village will become deserted. All the animals from the bush can now come to the village in order to die too. Then all the trees will die, so that the shrubs can grow and cover the whole earth. Then a large rainfall will come, turning the earth's surface into a totally level plain of mud. Mountains and other irregularities will fall down and dissolve in the mud. Then a wind will blow away all the water and the mud, leaving behind bare earth like a mat. Finally Allah will roll up the mat and store it somewhere in a hut where he keeps all his things.

However, though the story does contain some sweeping elements, nothing is found of the battlefields and drama of a true apocalypse. In contrast to apocalypses the story presents the end in a very cool and business-like way. In fact the story appears to be an almost perfect reverse of Genesis 1. God once rolled out His mat, and one day He will roll it back in. The element of the flood (Genesis 6-8) is an integrated part of this reversed creation process. Finally, the world is stored so there might always be a new beginning. As Van Beek (2000) argues, in many eschatological stories the endings are not definite endings but rather the start of new beginnings. Apocalypses in particular talk about new life, being here or elsewhere in heaven. It leaves alive a glimmer of hope.

Remarkably, there is a similarity between the end of the world scenario and the formula that is often used to end any story in North Cameroon (see section 5.3.2): *takalamoeloes, takande*. As explained before takande is a dish of meat that has been cooked for several days. At the end of the story, the word *takande* is used to indicate how all the different elements from the story have become united. In the beginning there is differentiation of persons and events. At the end everything has become an undifferentiated whole. This idea of *takande* also comes back in the-end-of-the-world story where the water finally turns all elements of the world into homogenous mud. Here the notion of unity is related not only to the end of the story but also to the end of the world. If all differences have disappeared, nothing is left but a *darngal*.

The following end-of-the-world vision from a villager Gatsji Tuduko, aged 60, in Pette, though very different from the previous one because it lies fully in the human realm, shares this notion that the end is associated with a loss of differentiation:

"A long time ago there were different tribes in the north of Cameroon that did not intermingle. They were always avoiding each other. Then a larger tribe came, the Fulbe, forming the new big contrast between them and all the other tribes. All the tribes became slaves of the Fulbe, which created a common base for them. This led to co-operation that could have never existed before. Now the Fulbe form a contrast with other big tribes in

Africa and we need the whites to form a new unity. And so on, and so forth, unity comes out of separation when there is a confrontation with a bigger group from outside. Finally there is no separation anymore. This final unity will be the end of the world."

Why this association of unity with the end of the world? It may in the first place be related to the general structure in stories (Paulme, 1976) in which a harmonic situation needs a conflict to come to a new situation. The re-establishment of harmony, *i.e.* a situation with few differences (*takande*) is then automatically the end of the story.

Linking the story with reality, it may be hypothesised that the association has to do with one of the major human needs: identity. Identity needs distinction. Local people especially deal with the problem of identity in a modernising world. The idea of unity also plays a role in Western ideas about the future, especially in connection with the process of globalisation. A globalising world sharing the same trends, information and values is a sign of progress for many western people. It is given form, for example, by the internet and the unification of Europe. However, critical remarks on unity are also made in western literature, e.g. Keesing (1991) and Milton (1996) who states that cultural diversity is a condition for the future, and Fukuyama (1992) who says that a loss of differences results in the end of history.

Although there exist several stories of which some include more information about what will happen to human life (Zwaal, 2002), it remains on an abstract and categorical level.
Yet other stories and visions do exist in North Cameroon that deal with the end at a more concrete and personal level. In the first place, people do believe there are real signs of the approaching end. When asking 50 people in four villages in North Cameroon about the nature of these signs, answers were given as presented in Table 5.5. Not all signs were mentioned by everyone but all signs were mentioned by several people.

These concrete signs show that the *darngal* is something quite conceivable for people. Moreover, they appear to have a more apocalyptic character than the stories. They do not show, however, what may be the cause that sets in motion the moment and the course of the *darngal*. Though some villagers consider this to be beyond human comprehension, others believe the moment of the *darngal* is not just the end of a fixed script written by God but depends on human acts and can thus be influenced. This stage is especially important for the environmental discourse since it refers to people's responsibilities and may thus have consequences for people's acts. In order to investigate the consequences of eschatological visions on the behaviour of people one should not only ask the question ***how*** the world will end but especially ***why*** the world will end.

1	A lot of commotion, different ideas and movements
2	Children that do not respect their parents anymore
3	Women that do not want to marry anymore
4	Everything becomes expensive
5	No justice and no powerful chiefs anymore
6	A lot of successive births and deaths
7	Diminishing rainfall and diminishing yields
8	Trees and animals start talking to people, warning and threatening them
9	Wild animals invade the village
10	Water becomes red and dirty
11	Light from the sun and the moon become more pale
12	The sun and the moon become red and finally black

Table 5.5: Signs of an approaching end of the world

An example of a story why the world will end is presented in box 5.12. As we may see from the 'moon story', as well as from the list of possible signs announcing a *darngal* we may conclude that most of them are purely social. They regard social codes of life, possibly inspired by religious ethics, which people have to obey. If people behave well, there will be no problem. If they do not behave well, God will punish people and roll up his mat. In Central Province there are several stories in which an animal known as Nya-min-min-bikokon with the shape of a dragon is sent by God in case people do not behave well. Once this animal arrives on earth this will mean the end of the world.

Box 5.12: Eclipse of the sun and the moon causing the end of the world
Mindif: Dide Chardi, age 80, female, Peul.

The sun, the moon and the stars can be covered to a certain extent. This is because the sun and the moon get lost in their track through the sky. Sometimes the moon leaves its track and starts following the track of the sun. Then you do not see it anymore.
The moon eclipse is observed very often and has a specific cause. Children that die very young, about one month old, will not be judged and automatically go to heaven. There they miss the milk of their mother. Sometimes they group together and start holding the moon. If the moon cannot continue its track it will gradually die off. This means the end of the world and the day of judgement. That way, children will be reunited with their mothers. In order to prevent this forced end, we have to bring sacrifices to the children. The mother is supposed to give Loma (a gift). A ceremony is organised where people in white clothes beat the drum to get the attention of the children. Then milk and white millet are offered to satisfy them, so they finally release the moon.

Box 5.13: The farmer and his wife
Maroua: Hassoumi, age 83, male, Peul.

In the province of the Far North, in Kousseri, there was a poor farmer who lived with his wife and his mother-in-law in the same house. He had to share the little food he had with them. At that time, millet was very expensive and they spent many days without eating.
One day, the man found some money in his field and with this money he bought some millet. He gave part of the millet to his wife and his mother-in-law. The wife, however, was not satisfied and she finally threw the millet in the toilet. Later, when the man went to the toilet he saw smoke coming out of the hole. The smoke started talking: "Your wife has thrown the millet in the toilet. Her wasteful behaviour is too dangerous for the village. The millet gives you two options for punishment: either there will be no rain during the next season, or several villagers will die."
The man left his house and went directly to the chief of the village, who, in turn, called together various people. They went to the house of the cultivator to verify the story. They indeed heard the voice in the toilet that said the same words as told by the farmer. They deliberated and after praying a lot and giving food to the poor they finally chose the second option. Some days later many people died, even people here in Maroua. Men, women and children died everywhere during a three month period. Then it was over. This all happened about five years ago.

The environment also shows up in these stories, it plays a specific role in the *darngal*. As we can see from Table 5.5, the environment starts to express its power. Animals come to the village and natural disasters destroy human life. I consider this to be important for the further discussion of this dissertation and I will come back to this in more detail in Chapter 6.

It is remarkable that many of the *darngal*-stories collected in the Far North are told from the perspective of a very local scale. In a story from Pette, a local *darngal*, the end of the village has taken place because a woman did not respect the millet (see Box 5.13). The same has been noticed for stories collected in Central Province. In Ndjolé a story was told about a young man who wanted to marry a girl from a village in which it was forbidden to eat mushrooms. The boy had not studied the traditions of his family-in-law, however, and did not respect the taboo. When he bought some mushrooms to the village this initiated a chain of events. Finally, a spider came down from the sky and all villagers escaped through the wire made by the spider. The boy just managed to escape before the world finally ended[17]. Some *darngal* stories are related to landscape features and will be discussed in the next section.

[17] In these stories we probably should not speak about the end of the world but rather a temporal and local end. However, as van Beek (2000) states: many ends are not just ends, but rather new beginnings. This is why I include them in the discussion.

5.6.5 Stories about the landscape: mythical geography

The final category of local stories I want to discuss concerns those related to physical features of the environment, especially their origin. This includes landscape characteristics such as rivers, hills, specific trees or forests, and savannahs. Moreover, it deals with certain natural phenomena that can be regularly observed, such as the rainbow or dust clouds. In this section I will discuss some examples of these stories.

Many of these stories were an outcome of one of the methods used in each village during one of the beginning sessions: environmental mapping (see for methodology section 3.1). The drawings made by the villagers often reflect important elements of the environment. Questions could be asked about why a certain tree has been drawn, or why a certain place has been represented in a more prominent way than another. In Annex 2, an example of a drawing from Ndjolé is shown. A second way through which many of these stories were collected was walking around and asking questions about the environment.

In Central Province the most important environmental features found are connected to the origin of the village; they include trees, sacred savannahs and forests, and hills. Many of the stories about these features can be considered to fall in the category of historical stories that have already been discussed. Among others I refer to the story in Ndjolé about the tree that started growing on the site where the chief's head was buried (see section 4.6).[18] Furthermore, there is the story about a sacred tree that was originally in Nguila, which was finally cut by an employee of the logger Michael (see Box 5.14 for the whole story). The sacred forest of Nguila is right on the top of the sacred hill where the village once had its beginning.

Apart from being described in historical stories these sacred places, as well as other names of forests and trees can play a role in fiction stories. An example is Baliki. In Ndjolé, there are stories about a sacred savannah that is situated around Bissagne and Mbajana, an area of about 6 km that is purely savannah, called Whedome.

Apart from historical stories and fiction stories about special features in the environment there are also more mythological stories dealing with the landscape. In Zimado, a village in the floodplain in the Far North[19] there is a typical landmark, a hill, about which the story presented in Box 5.15 was told. As we can see, this story has a rather mythical character in spite of the fact it deals with a very local situation in the past. Moreover, it could be considered as an end-of-the-world story, related to the stories dicussed in the former section.

[18] This place is still a sacred place. It is right next to the old cemetery.
[19] Although originally a Kotoko village it is now inhabited mostly by Mousgoum (Van Est, 1999).

Box 5.14: About witches and trees
Nguila: Visoe Martin, age 35, male, Babouti.

We left with a group of four, including my elder brother Adia, Sansaré and others. We went by bicycle to drink palm wine about two kilometres from here. We drank about 10 litres. It was about eight o'clock. We drove with two bicycles that had light in the front. When arriving at the hill of Yare, before getting at the top, we smelled something like perfume. That smell! They said it came from the Hausa that were walking in front of us. We did not know that it was from the bad spirit, you know. So we saw somebody who was very tall, tall, even taller than a person. We asked ourselves who could that tall person be? The two with the lights on their bicycle fled. They left us. I wanted to cycle very fast but my feet missed the pedals and I fell on the ground. When I stood up I looked and saw that type that was standing there in front of me, like that. I felt two times. I stood up and pushed my bike running on the ground. I could not get on to my cycle. After twenty metres I jumped on my cycle and I arrived. The other four said that really, we should not talk. If we did we were going to die. This experience made us afraid for our lives. The figure was about 6 metres tall. It is what we call Nkader. We were so afraid. There was fire, three flames on his head. He had no skin, it was like a cloth, completely white. It was only the fire point that we could see. The person, he still lives, is Abdoulai. There is a tree with prickles there, near to that house with several storeys. Well, the people did not know. They said you should not cut that tree because sometimes in the night there are sorcerers that stay there. If we cut that tree they will take revenge. But someone decided to cut that tree. He is there, he is still alive. He said that he would cut that tree, the one that was next to him. The people said: "No, don't cut it." He did. When he was busy with his saw, waahh, the people were there aside to watch and see the wood was already cut down. First there was an owl that came out of the tree itself. On the wood there were larva and scorpions crawling, lots of them. When the tree fell, the owl left and flew into the forest. The scorpions were crawling and said: "You see, we told you not to cut that tree. Now you see the mystic power." He managed to cut the tree. He was supposed to die. The sorcerers watched over the tree. Among the people who die were also some of them but we do not know exactly who they are. It is not for sure the sorcerers even live in this village, but we can never know who is a sorcerer. It is only at night, they come together. The tree has been cut and they have left. The owl has not returned. There were I am sleeping there is an owl at Mr. Jean's house. Nothing has happened yet. Before there were wild animals with chains. Now everything is over. Before the people transformed themselves into panthers, with chains, but they do not come here anymore. The sorcerers stay far away, they don't come to the village now. They stay very far away. If you go hunting you can find the panther, the lion, the hyena, the buffalo but no elephants anymore.

Box 5.15: Story about Zimado
Zina: Noukouri Whabou, age 67, male, Kotoko.

A long time ago people settled in Zimado. There were always some vultures around, eating dead bodies. The villagers noticed this and started speculating about whether these vultures lived in the sky or whether they had their residence somewhere far away in the mountains. In order to find the answer, they decided to do an experiment. They started making a long rope out of millet twigs. They worked on it for years until the rope was long enough to reach the sky. At one end of the rope they made a trap to catch the bird. They put a dead body on the ground to attract the vultures. One vulture put his leg in the trap and was caught by the rope. He flew up and took the rope with him. The people watched the rope rolling off and they saw it going straight up. Finally it stopped and the people concluded that the vulture must have come home and that it was thus living in the sky. Since the people were sure a vulture must have a tree to rest on, they wanted to see a branch of this heaven tree.
They started pulling the rope in and the vulture resisted by holding a branch of the tree. Finally the branch broke and the vulture fell down to earth, together with the branch. That is how the villagers discovered the residence of the vulture. God, however, was not happy that people discovered this secret and in order to punish them he sent a heavy tornado that covered the whole village with sand. Years later, one could still pass the sandy hill and hear the people living in it. When the food was finished all the people died. Later on, other people came to settle down next to the hill and they founded the new Zimado. Until today the hill is still there.

Another rather mythological story, related to religion as well, is the story about the 'inselberg' in Mindif. Mindif, about 20 km from the provincial capital of Maroua can be easily recognized by the so-called 'pique du Mindif'. This *pique* is known by villagers from Mindif, as well as from the surrounding villages, including even Pette, to be the home of the so-called *Dutal*. This *Dutal* is described as an enormous vulture that lives in a hole on the top of the *pique*, fettered to a big iron chain. According to the stories, God has put the *Dutal* there a long time ago in order to guard the world. It has to stay there, because if it should break free, then on that day the world will end. The *Dutal* is continuously fed by other smaller vultures that always bring the first part of their prey to the *Dutal*.

Villagers from Mindif (including Dide Chardi, an eighty-year old woman) remember how, about some fifty years ago, there was a group of Americans that wanted to see the vulture. During their two week stay, they organised a ceremony with drums and dances. The moment they finally started to climb the real *pique*, there was a sudden supernatural force like a very strong wind that pushed them down. People in the village started playing faster on the drums, and then they could even see other people dancing on the mountain. The Americans never managed to reach the top.

Thus, nobody has ever physically seen the *Dutal*, and some people, especially younger ones, doubt the real existence of the vulture. Others, however, are convinced it is there and they perceive it as a guardian of moral order. Like one villager said: *if people behave badly, God will unchain the Dutal. It will come down and the world will be destroyed.*

The Dutal is not the only animal that is living on the *pique* Mindif. In the past especially, there were many other animals there, such as kobs and panthers. Boundi Maidougou (aged 85, Fulbe) from Mindif told an interesting story about the origin of the ivory trade, including many animals. In the beginning it was very difficult to get the tusks of an elephant. One man was very intelligent. He had put some salt on the rocks of the *pique* Mindif. All the animals from the brousse came eating the salt: antelopes, gazelles, hyenas and also the elephant came. But since the rocks are very hard, he broke his tusks. That is how people got the tusks of the elephant and the salesmen came to buy the ivory. That is why it is still widely sold until a law came into force that forbade the trade of ivory. But it is through the inventiveness of the locals that we got our ivory.

Most of the animals that originally were supposed to have lived in the area of the *pique* have left for a special reason. For example, about 175 years ago, under the regime of a very fair chief Modibo, there were a lot of ducks on the mountain, locally called *Bogodje*. Modibo always warned the villagers not to catch these ducks and to always treat them correctly. The day Modibo died, however, the people started catching the ducks. After some days the Bogodje all assembled, they flew three circles around the house of Modibo and finally left in the direction of the floodplain. They have never returned and since that day there is no justice anymore and many things have gone wrong in Mindif. I will come back to this in section 6.3.1.

In a final example of this category of stories I briefly want to discuss stories about a natural phenomenon that was often mentioned: the rainbow. In the Far North, the rainbow is closely related to features in the landscape since it is presumed that every rainbow starts and ends in a termite hill. In the Far North the termite hill is a place where many bad spirits live, and so the rainbow is considered to be evil. It is supposed to drink the water from the clouds and thus preventing heavy rainfalls. In Central Province, where rainfall is plentiful, the termite hill is perceived differently. Here, the termite hill is often a place where people transform themselves into an animal. Moreover, it contains powers that can help people. One story, for instance, tells about a girl receiving magical powers out of the termite hill with which she finally wins the war. In the Central Province there is no relation between termite hills and rainbows. Here stories about rainbows are related to snakes, often referring to the mythical snake Ohwoo and are based on the story about the character called Indom (see Box 5.16).

Box 5.16: The rainbow: Indom
Ndjolé: Noumana Augustine, age 60, female, Baveck.

Indom was someone who lived in higher places, I can even say that it was a snake. It is he who often makes the sound from above: Poemm! Nobody can see him.
Well, there was his wife, and her younger sister was very cussed. Indom was married but had never seen his wife. Indom lived in a room with a locked door. His family prepared food which they put in front of his door and nobody knew when he was eating. That is how they lived for a long time. His father did not see him, his mother did not see him, even his wife did not see him. He just stayed in his room.
One day his wife had gone to the field and the little sister said: "Why can't we see the husband of my elder sister?" She started to take away the barrier in front of the door. Then Indom started to sing (song 1):

The pure and young traveller *Indom, Indom*
How can she live with someone she cannot see?
The pure and young traveller *Indom, Indom*

And he also started to sing another song (song 2)
Sister-in-law, oh sister-in-law draw back *kabong le komkomkom*
Sister-in-law, draw back, I will get you *kabong le komkomkom*
The father who put me on earth *kabong le komkomkom*
Has never seen Indom *kabong le komkomkom*
The mother who put me on earth *kabong le komkomkom*
Has never seen Indom *kabong le komkomkom*

And while singing the sister-in-law sang: song 1 (repetition)
And Indom sang: song 2 (repetition)

During that time the young girl removed the barrier from the door. Indom tried to push her back with the song but she continued: song 2 (repetition). And the sister sang: song 1 (repetition). The girl unlatched the door and opened it. When the door was open Indom pursued her and dragged her into the sky. That is when she took her machete and cut off a part of Indom. That part was the snake which became the rainbow. The other part took the little sister into the sky. That is why that when the rain snarls: poem! on the other side the sister-in-law answers: Ahoem!

5.7 Storytelling and gender

"Les bons griots sont comme des femmes, elles font vivre la vie au passé"

At the outset of the present section, a methodological caveat must be mentioned. For the discussion I will present some quantitative data in this section. However, it is very difficult to do any statistical analyses on the gender influence in the stories collected. The simple reason for this is that one can never oversee (let alone determine) all the different parameters that together influence the final outcome of the story. For example, if one wants to say something about the type of stories that are told by women compared to those told by men, one also needs to have information about the influence of the audience, preceding stories etc. Notwithstanding this limitation, I will try to describe some tendencies that can be observed if we consider the stock of collected stories as if it were independent data. This means that for a while every story is considered to be unbiased by preceding stories by the same narrator or other narrators. Although formally incorrect (see chapter 3), the sample size may be big enough to give a general impression of the gender factor.

As we have seen in the previous sections, in both regions storytelling is performed by men as well as women. The question now is, are there any differences between storytelling of male and female narrators? Here again, differences may be lain in the field of setting, format or content of the story.

If we first look at the setting of the storytelling, there are several things to note. Firstly, concerning the storyteller him/herself. In Central Province, 56 different storytellers were registered, among which 14 women and 42 men. In the Far North, 99 different storytellers were registered among which 40 women and 59 men. As has been noted before, the age of the storytellers varied a lot. Table 5.6 presents the data about the age of the storytellers in general and with respect to gender.

Age (years)	Total Far North	Male Far North	Female Far North	Total Central	Male Central	Female Central
Mean	40.45	41.64	38.70	39.51	40.12	37.57
Median value	35.00	36.00	32.50	35.00	34.50	38.50
Standard deviation of the mean	22.60	23.57	21.27	17.58	17.00	19.15

Table 5.6: Age of storytellers (total/male/female) in the Far North and Central Province

As we can see, these values do not differ much between male and female and between the two regions. Moreover, the standard deviations show that both male and female storytellers vary a lot in age.

Secondly, we should note the setting and the composition of the audience with respect to the gender of the storyteller. Although no detailed descriptions were made of the audience during each story it can be said that in general, as we have mentioned in section 5.2, the sessions are open to anybody, so we cannot speak of a fixed audience. Nevertheless, during open interviews in Pette as well as in Nguila, people said that the education of children through stories is more often done by women. Related to this, women more often refused to tell stories in an alternative setting, such as during daytime just for the sake of the researcher. They then told me to come back at night, as this was the time they were supposed to tell stories to their children. During daytime they were busy with other activities. Men on the contrary were more willing to tell stories in any context without being concerned about the audience or setting.

	Total north	**Male north**	**Female north**	**Total central**	**Male central**	**Female central**
N	241	136	105	215	158	57
	%	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**	**%**
Songs	17.8	5.9	33.3	22.3	15.8	40.4
Dilemma	4.1	7.4	0	2.8	3.8	0
Moral	23.6	28.7	17.1	37.7	43.0	22.8

Table 5.7: Different format features used by storytellers (total/male/female) in the Far North and Central Province

With regard to the format of the story, there are several differences between men and women. In the first place many informants explained that songs are much more often used in stories by women. In the Far North men almost never sing because they feel ashamed to do so. Especially Fulbe who claim to be real Muslims stated that men were not supposed to sing. If a story was really supposed to contain a song[20] male storytellers simply recited the text of the song or informed the listener about the existence of a song in that part of the story by using a non-narrative text. From the eight male-narrated stories that contained a song (see table 5.7), three were told by the same storyteller[21]. With one exception, all male storytellers using songs were younger than 35 (two were 15) and none of them was Fulbe. This confirms

[20] This could be known by the existence of other versions of the story, those including a song or because the song played a crucial role in the story.
[21] This may already indicate why using statistics is extremely difficult.

the idea that traditional Muslim customs do not allow men to sing in stories. In Central Province, songs were more frequent than in the Far North. Here too, women sing far more often than men do, although no restrictions with regard to men singing were found. Therefore, the percentage of men using songs is considerably higher than in the Far North.

Another characteristic of the format is the way to finish a story. In the first place whether a story had a closed end or whether it finished with a question. All stories had a closed end except six stories in Central Province and nine in the Far North. These stories ended with a question, the so-called dilemma tales (see table 5.7). All these dilemma tales were told by men. As has been discussed before, almost all stories with a closed end do have an implicit moral or at least a judgement about good and bad characters. To what extent, however, this moral is openly expressed can differ between storytellers. Brinkman (1996) discovered that in Kenya, men tend to be more explicit in the moral of the story. It would be interesting to compare these findings with my data. To do so, within the total collection of stories with a closed end, a division was made between stories with a clear literal moral conclusion such as a proverb or a concluding sentence, and stories in which the moral was left open. In table 5.7 the former type is called a moral story.

Table 5.7 shows that on the whole, people in Central Province tell a moral story more frequently than in the Far North. No explanation was found for this. As we can further see there is a slight gender difference that corresponds with the findings of Brinkman. However, one should be careful in drawing this conclusion too quickly. One might expect that apart from gender, the use of morality in stories depends on at least two other factors: the individual preference of the storyteller and the type of stories that were told in the same session.[22]. However, with respect to the individual storyteller no such relation was found. Listening to several stories of one storyteller, in most cases the stories with and without moral alternated. The same held for the storytelling sessions. No relation with regard to moral endings was found between stories that directly followed each other. One may thus carefully conclude that, as was found by Brinkman, in general men add a clear moral or conclusion more often than women do. This is also in accordance with what was often expressed by women during interviews on this matter: *"Stories should be open, the listeners have to draw their own conclusions. That is how real learning evolves."*

The lack of morality does not mean that stories told by women have less educational value. However, the moral is more hidden, more implicit and should be understood by the audience by considering the fates of the different characters in the story. The moral is in the story itself and does not have to be repeated literally. The use of a fixed end formula makes it easier to round off a story without losing yourself in concluding sentences. Interestingly, in the Far North men tend to use longer versions of stories without fixed formula, adding many details and repetition. This may increase the chance of introducing moral remarks.

[22] This would again imply that stories cannot be considered as independent data and this may thus bias the results.

Thus, women prefer to tell a story in a more open way, without clear moral implication, leaving it to the listener to interpret. Strangely enough, dilemma tales, being the most open ended of all, were never told by women in spite of the fact that, at first sight, these tales seem to represent a 'female way' of storytelling. To explain this it could be suggested that for women the dilemma form, which expect the audience to openly discuss their opinion, is a too explicit way of expressing their ideas. In addition, women are in general not supposed to initiate or to lead a discussion.

The next remark about gender influences concerns the type of stories. To discuss this I would like to refer to the distinction that was made earlier in this chapter between fiction, non-fiction and mythological stories. Based on this, the following sub categories were defined (see table 5.8):

* Fiction stories:
- Fable: story with only animals, representing human characters,
- Fiction stories about people (sometimes including animals as well): this includes fairy tales, dilemma stories and aetiological stories about people.

* Non-fiction stories:
- Personal experiences or life histories,
- Legends: non-fiction stories about wars or heroic actions in the past.

* Mythological
- Myths: non-fiction stories referring to an undefined moment in the past, mostly explaining a phenomenon.

In addition, a separate category of religious stories is defined, ***i.e.*** stories dealing with God or stories derived from religious documents like the Koran or the Bible. It should be noted that some stories have characteristics that fit into more than one category, for example, some myths do contain religious elements.

In spite of the difficulties of interpreting this data, some general trends may be distinguished with regard to gender in the two regions. With regard to fact and fiction, most stories have a fictional character, be it fables, fairy tales or other. If we look at the percentages in both the Far North and Central Province, we see that men slightly prefer to tell fables over fairy tales, whereas the most common story type told by women is definitely not the fable. Women mostly prefer telling fairy tales. As far as historical stories are concerned these are preferred by men, although the difference is only striking in the Central Province. Legends, which were only found in Central Province (with the exception of one), are most often told by men. Myths are slightly more often told by women. This is surprising since this category is related to ritual stories, such as the *Mvet* or the Sunjata Epos (Jansen *et al.*, 1998), which in most cultures belong to the realm of men. Finally, there is a story type that is a minor part of the total realm: religious stories. This type is preferred by men. Religious stories are told by

women in the Far North, however, in spite of the fact that the Moslem tradition does in general not allow women to talk openly about religion. In Central Province, women do not tell religious stories.

Story type	Total F.North (n=241)	Male F.North (n=136)	Female F.North (n=105)	Total Central (n=214)	Male Central (n=158)	Female Central (n=56)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Fable	27.0	38.2	15.2	36.9	39.9	29.6
Other-fiction	49.8	36.0	63.8	38.8	32.3	57.1
Personal	9.5	9.6	9.5	9.3	12.0	1.8
Legend	0.4	0.7	0	5.6	7.0	1.8
Myth	9.1	8.8	9.5	7.9	7.0	10.7
Religious	6.6	8.8	3.8	3.2	4.4	0

Table 5.8: Different story types told by the storytellers (total/male/female) in the Far North and Central Province

5.8 Concluding remarks: stories in the Far North and Central Province

This chapter aimed to give an overview of the universe of stories in the two regions of Cameroon, based on the analysis of the stories collected during the fieldwork. As we have seen, stories exist in many variations both with respect to narration style (format) and content. In spite of many cultural and ecological differences between the two regions (see chapter 4), the stories appear to be quite corresponding, especially as far as fictional stories such as fables and fairy tales are concerned. Differences were found too, for example, the role of some animals in stories such as the turtle. In Central Province, the turtle is the hero whereas in the Far North it is almost absent in stories and has a rather negative image.

Some differences that were found between stories in the two regions are related to the environment. They relate in the first place to landscapes and natural characters such as animals. It is not surprising to meet animals or landscape features that are specific for the region in which the story is told. Secondly, the same animals or landscape elements may have a different interpretation in the two regions. For instance, the role of the termite hill is opposite in stories from the Far North and Central Province. In the first region, the termite hill is the place of evil spirits or witchcraft, and it takes away the rain[23]. In stories from

[23] Stories about a lack of rain are relatively rare in Central Province. This is of course not surprising since the problem of drought is much more prevalent in the Far North.

Central Province, however, termite hills play a more positive role. This different perception with respect to this environmental phenomenon could be explained from a biological perspective. In both regions termites occur but the species differ. The most occurring species of termite in the Far North is the big red termite that is aggressive and even venomous. They are of no direct use to the local people. In Central Province on the other hand, termites are small black ones that are even collected and eaten by the people.

In spite of these exceptions, the main conclusion is that stories in the Far North and Central Province are remarkably similar and share a great richness both in format and content. Almost all stories were told in different versions and the same story themes showed up in different stories. Moreover, there appears to be a great fluidity in the length of a story, the style of narration and the characteristics of the storyteller and the audience. Apparently, there is a great freedom for composing and telling a story. As long as one obeys a few rules, for example related to the use of fixed formulas and the meaning of certain animal characters, everybody is free to tell any story. This makes storytelling in general highly interesting as a method for intercultural communication. First, because both locals and outsiders can take the role of a storyteller in local contexts. Second, because it is possible to compose new stories adapted to new themes that one wants to discuss.

6 Stories and the environment

"Le secret de l'Afrique, c'est dans les contes."

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will analyse the general data set of stories collected in the Far North and Central Province with respect to nature and the environment. As concluded, the data set indicates a substantial resemblance between stories in the two different regions of Cameroon. This may only stimulate the initial idea of using stories in a general and active way. After all, if it had turned out that stories are linked to specific local circumstances it would be difficult to advocate its potential importance for intercultural communication. We can thus now take the next step in the research, which may be formulated by the question: *what do these stories tell us about the local perceptions concerning the environment and its relationship with people?*

In order to answer this question we first need to know the relationship between what is told in a story and what people perceive in their daily real world. Assuming that stories influence people and have an educational value, stories can be expected to influence people's perception and, ultimately, people's action. The question remains, however, in what way does it influence people's action? In other words: how do the local people interpret the stories? This depends in the first place to what extent a story is believed to be a representation of reality. Whether or not the big bad wolf frightens us, for example, depends on whether or not we believe in his existence. A theoretical story about the protection of nature will not necessarily lead to different behaviour if the story is not believed to be connected to reality. The problem of fact and fiction will be further discussed in section 6.2.

The reality content is one factor influencing the kind of impact a story may ultimately have. There may be more. In the rest of this chapter I will give some concrete examples of stories and the different levels on which they may operate. Based on the theory in section 2.2, I will work from the most concrete level of factual knowledge to a more abstract level regarding worldviews and underlying assumptions.

6.2 Reality and fiction: a problem?

The issue of fact and fiction is essential for understanding the message of a story. As discussed earlier the difference between fact and fiction is difficult to make in spite of the fact that this is exactly what the local categorisation, e.g. *talol* and *taria* in the Far North, is based on. Whether a story belongs to a certain local category is, in practice, often simply defined by the storyteller who announces that he is going to tell a *talol* or a *taria*.

It could be suggested from the stories collected and people's reaction to them, that most stories announced as non-fiction, such as personal experiences or histories, are also considered as such by the audience and are thus interpreted literally. The problem mainly lies in the interpretation of the realm of fiction stories, for example whether these stories are seen as a literal representation of reality (e.g. involving only some transpositions of names or characters) or as a symbolic representation of reality, or as just pure fiction that does not refer to reality at all. Since, as we have seen the major part of the collected stories lie in the category of fiction, this question deserves some attention here.

Let me start by giving an example. In Central Province two similar stories were told by two different storytellers in separate sessions. Both stories are about a lion who believes he is the king of the *brousse*. One day it is told that there is one creature that exceeds his power: the human being[1]. In version 1 it is the hedgehog, in version 2 it is the lioness that informs the lion about this shocking fact. At first the lion does not believe it, and wants to encounter his rival. When he finally meets a man, this man shows his power by the use of a gun (version 1) or fire (version 2). The lion can only run away, and in both versions the story is finished. However, the remarkable difference between the two versions lies in the final sentence of the story. Both versions end with a moral statement. In version 1, the lion says: "I cannot deny this power anymore. Although I thought that I was the king of the *brousse*, I have to recognise that there is a creature that is stronger than me." In version 2 the storyteller adds the non-narrative comment: "So since we have been living on this earth, you should never think you are the strongest because then you will be surpassed by someone who is stronger."

The difference between the two versions is twofold. First, it is a difference between literal and figurative meaning. In the first version the lion is the animal whereas in the second version the lion represents a human person who thinks he is the strongest. Second, the moral at the end differs. In the first version the moral regards the hierarchy of living beings that should be respected, whereas in the second version the moral is entirely social: not to be arrogant. The first version may be interesting for the environmental debate since it discusses the human-animal relationship. In the second version, however, there is no clear link with environmentalism at all.

One can, of course, never know all the different versions of a story that occur or may occur in the future. One can therefore never be sure about the final meaning of a story. Fortunately, in the example of the lion story, the difference is made clear by the storyteller himself. This is not obvious in all situations. Sometimes it can become clear when looking at the reaction of the audience. One night in Nguila, a story was told about a hare and a dog, that were both looking for a beautiful girl. At first this appears to be a typical fable story, which I definitely interpreted as a symbolic representation of the human world, but it finally

[1] In one version a human being is called Motbinam, meaning literally: the one that stands up straight.

elicited a discussion about the typical behaviour of the hare, based on many personal experiences of hunters in the field. One of the villagers concluded: ”and that is why you can see that this story is really a good example of how the hare behaves…” The villagers thus interpreted at least part of the story in a literal way, *i.e.* as information about animal behaviour.

The examples should illustrate that it is extremely difficult for an outsider to estimate the real meaning of the story. This is aggravated by the common narration technique of exaggeration or hyperbole (see 5.3.3). This implies that non-fiction events can become exaggerated for the sake of the story and can in that way obtain a fictional character. According to a woman in Nguila every story is based on a real event but later becomes a fictional story by exaggerating the separate events. Whether a story tells fact or fiction depends on the storyteller, the audience, and probably even on the storytelling situation.

To deal with the problem of interpretation, I work from the premise known as the ‘real-life theory’ discussed in section 2.3. The premise that there is always a link between the narrative world and the real world implies that all stories have a connection with reality at some level and to some extent. Since one can never know the existing versions and the final impact I propose to assume that all stories should be considered as multi-interpretable, including the possible links to the environment in stories. These links may of course not always be clear to all listeners, but they may at least influence part of the audience. Stories are thus seen as inherently plural in the sense that they can be interpreted socially, environmentally, or both. The discussion of the link between stories and environmental issues, being the theme of this chapter, needs thus to be as broad as possible ranging from literal information about the environment to metaphorical indications about the value of nature and relationship between people and the environment. With this in mind, I will now further analyse the database of stories.

When looking for stories to improve the intercultural dialogue on environmental conservation it would initially be most obvious to look literally for possible indications of awareness of respect for or protection of nature in stories. After all, this would make the dialogue very easy and direct. The question is thus: do local stories advocate a message of environmental protection? This question is addressed in the next section.

6.3 The environmental message in stories

6.3.1 Exploring the collected stories

As we may conclude from the set of stories collected, most stories contain environmental elements. These include in the first place animals, but also vegetation and abiotic elements such as rivers or mountains. Moreover, stories may deal with specific elements typical for the local environment such as certain animal species or landmarks.

It is difficult, however, to deal with these elements in a literal way. As indicated before, and as stated by several authors (Van Londen, 1994; Schipper, 1990a), most stories deal with social relations rather than environmental themes. Animals are like mirrors to people, and moral lessons mainly concern codes for social rather than environmental behaviour. What is more, environmental problems are linked with this social behaviour. For the sake of clarity I will give two examples.

The first example concerns stories about the problem of drought. As explained in Chapter 4, lack of water is one of the most prevalent problems in the Far North, as it is in many regions of the Sahel. As could be expected, the problem of drought can be found back in stories. In several stories humans as well as animals have to deal with this problem. Some stories deal with the competition around a waterhole, discussing the different characteristics of specific animals that claim to have the first right to drink. There is, however, also a variation of stories that offer a solution for the drought. In box 6.1 one story version is presented. Here we can see that the smile of a girl, a typical social element, is directly related with the rainfall. In the total realm of collected stories, this is the only influencing factor that was mentioned as a solution for the problem.

Box 6.1: The smiling lady and the rain
Manga: Aissatou Tammata, age 30, female, Peul.

Once there was a man who wanted to marry two women. To the youngest one, Kellougana, he offered only a small part of his goods. The mother of Kellougana did not agree with this and forbade her daughter to marry. Kellougana, however, loved the man so much that she still wanted to marry him, no matter what conditions. The mother did not change her decision and Kellougana became very upset, and the rain ceased to fall. The people became thirsty and begged: "Please, don't be angry, go to your husband."
The girl answered: "No, I can't. My mother forbade me."
The villagers looked for milk and offered it to her to console her. She drank the milk and felt a little happier. It started raining.

Probably more surprisingly, the problem of drought also shows up in stories from Central Province. Here too there are several comparable stories, such as a story in which all animals meet to discuss the problem of drought. They finally decide that they have to sing. Nobody's song is heard except that of the small tadpole who appears to have a wonderful voice. After his song, it starts raining. Although the story is built on the common notion that human and animal behaviour influences the heavens, the real story content is about the different animals and their voices rather than on the real problem of drought.

The second example of linking social behaviour with environmental phenomena is a rather mythological story about the peak of Mindif, which was discussed in section 5.6.5. In the period of the chief Modibo this peak was full of birds, which were seen as having a

personal relationship with the chief. This chief Modibo was the representative of moral justice. After his death the birds came down from the peak, circled around his house and left. From that moment, the specific bird species has disappeared in the Mindif area. In the story this environmental phenomenon (the disappearance of a species) is thus directly linked with a social one, the death of justice and the beginning of a world of low morality. As expressed by a villager: *"since that day, the birds have left and there is no justice any more in Mindif, no truth."*

These two examples indicate that it is rather difficult to expect direct reference points for an environmental discourse in local stories. Environmental problems such as drought or the disappearance of animals do occur as themes in stories indicating that people do perceive these phenomena. However, in the two examples the cause and possible solutions for the problem are not directly related to what we would call in supra-local terms: 'environmentally sound acts'. They rather link up with socially desirable behaviour. It might be interesting to further explore this by considering some more examples, particularly those stories that start with the statement or a problem that appears to be promising for environmental conservation. Let us consider three specific themes found in stories.

Theme 1: animals that beg to be saved

In the Far North there is a story about a hunter that one day stands eye to eye with a Buffon's kob. As soon as he wants to shoot the kob the animal begins to talk, explaining to the hunter that she is the last kob mother in the world and that she has two young at home. She begs the hunter to let her go home for a minute to explain to her young that she has to die. Although the hunter does not believe the kob is ever going to return he feels sorry for the kob and finally he lets her go (see for full story box 6.2). So far the story could have been a perfect introduction for educating the need of nature protection. After all, it might touch on the issue of extinction as well as on the human reaction to it. But then the story follows a different track. The kob arrives home, tells her two young what has happened and offers her last milk to them. The younger one refuses to drink, however, mourning for his mother, but the elder one took twice as much milk. After an hour the kob mother leaves the house to go and see the hunter. The hunter is very surprised to see the kob again and because she kept her promise he refuses to kill the kob. The kob mother goes home but only finds her younger cub alive. The elder has died because he drunk the milk while not caring for his mother's death.

Although the story seemed to start with an environmental problem, *i.e.* the extinction of an animal species, the final moral is purely social. In short, the story tells that you have to keep your promise, and that you have to respect your parents instead of being selfish. The phenomenon of 'extinction' is a non-issue in the story.

Box 6.2: The hunter and the last kob
Zina: Souleman Ndango, age 25, male, Mousgoum.

A hunter once caught a Buffon's kob. But before killing him, the kob started crying and said: "Please hunter, let me go. I have two children at home."
The hunter refused since he did not want to miss this nice meal. The kob continued: "Please, hunter, let me at least go home to warn my children that I am not coming back anymore, so they can look for someone else to take care of them."
The hunter said: "If I let you go, you will not return."
"I promise I will return."
" I do not believe you."
The kob kept on begging and finally the hunter let the kob go provided that she had to return by the next morning. The kob went home to tell her two children the bad news. She called them to drink her milk for the last time. The eldest did not feel sorry and just enjoyed drinking a lot of milk. But the younger one refused to drink the milk. He felt so sad, realizing he had to miss his beloved mother.
The next morning the kob returned to see the hunter. The hunter was surprised. He said: "I never expected you to come back. Since you kept your word, I will let you go." The kob was very happy and went back to see her children. Arriving home, however, she found the eldest one had died. From this day on, kobs give birth to only one young.

The same tendency can be found in a story from Central Province about a bird that was caught in a trap and asked for mercy. This happened several times, in which the bird had to convince two different brothers to release him. The first was a good boy, who was always polite and friendly. He set the bird free. The second was a bad boy, who was always naughty. He did not set the bird free but instead he took the bird home and his wife cooked it. Finally, the good boy got in trouble by getting caught by some ogress, and he was saved by the bird. The naughty boy finally got into the same trouble but was not saved.

In this story there seems to be a rather straightforward incentive for saving a bird. After all, the boy who did not save the bird was killed by the ogress. However, the bird in the story did not at all represent an ordinary bird. His family considered it to be a supernatural force. For this reason, the boy who saved the bird was initially even despised by his family. Later in the story, his family is happy with him because he returns home with a lot of treasures he has taken from the ogress. The reason why he saved the bird was, according to the boy in the story: *"If you catch something that normally does not talk, and now it talks, it is like a miracle. That is why I let it go. If it was predestined by God that it was a normal bird, I would have eaten it."*

From this sentence we may conclude that the emotion of the good boy was not compassion but rather a feeling of awe for a supernatural force. Indeed, the bird was not a vulnerable creature. On the contrary, it appeared to be strong enough to save the boy by some

supernatural magic that finally defeated the ogress. The story ends with a moral, the good boy speaking to his naughty brother (who had undergone a miraculous resurrection) : *"That is what happens if you are not listening; if you are naughty*[2] *and impolite, you get punished in the end."* So here again, the story talks about a social moral, in this case obedience.

To give a final example, in a story a boy meets a bird that starts to sing: "If you kill me do not pluck me. If you pluck me do not cook me. If you cook me do not eat me." The boy ignores the bird, however, and plucks it, cooks it and eats it. When his father comes home he finds the boy to be dead. Again this could be a stimulus for not catching birds but finally the story ends with a clear moral: *"So this is a story about gluttony. A child should not contradict his parents. It is because of obstinacy that gluttony has come into this world."* This moral does of course have no direct link with catching birds.

Theme 2: the notion of declining animal populations

Another interesting theme for environmentalists may be the notion of declining numbers of animals. There are several stories in Central Province about hunters who are dealing with the problem of a declining animal population.

In most cases the hunters experience the decrease of an animal population but sometimes the problem is expressed by the animals themselves. One story from Nguila starts as follows:

The monkey was the 'town crier' of the village. One day he went broadcasting that the king had called all the animals to come together and build a village because people were accustomed to burning the savannah regularly. This endangered the life of the animals and therefore the number was decreasing. All the animals had to stay quiet and regroup themselves against the human beings. The animals came together and built the village. They were very well organised. The lion was chief and the elephant was his representative. As their representative of justice they chose the hare. The house of the hare was far away from the village, like the quarter of the Hausa[3]*. If there was a problem the hare had to return from a long distance.*

Again this seems a good starting point for discussing environmental problems. However, the rest of the story focuses entirely on the personal problem of the hare, leading to a funny clue: he finally uses the hyena as his horse. The human-caused problem of burning savannah does not get any more attention in the story.

Some stories deal with a declining population but in a rather different way. In the Far North there is an aetiological story that discusses the reason why elephants only give birth to one young. According to the story, the elephant went complaining about this fact at the place of God. However, God explained him that he was too big and he was eating too much, so in

[2] It should be noted that in the story the indication of good and bad are reversed. The good boy from the beginning becomes the naughty boy at the end.

[3] This quarter is situated about 2 km from Nguila

order to protect other living beings, the number of elephants needed to be limited. Here a declining population is thus seen as a solution rather than a problem.

Related to this theme there are stories in which nature takes personal revenge on people who endanger its life. In stories from Central Province it is often the clever turtle that manages to defeat mankind, often by catching a person by closing his rear side. Revenge often takes place through witchcraft. Many old trees, for example, are inhabited by spirits that take revenge if you cut the tree. A typical example of witchcraft that appears in this context is shapeshifting. In Central Province there are numerous stories about this such as a story about a hunter who kills hundreds of buffaloes each day. One of the buffaloes decides to kill the boy by transforming him into a beautiful girl and seducing the boy. The boy is enticed to a remote place in the savannah. There the fight takes place. He is finally saved by his first wife who appears to possess magical power. The story expresses the idea that animals may be strong enough to fight for their existence. However, in the end, mankind always gains a victory over the animals. I will come back to this in section 6.8.

Theme 3: the act of personally protecting animals

A third theme that can be found in stories concerns the individual act of protecting animals. In Zina people talked about the *Kwoikwoi*, a spirit that manifests itself as a herder, going along with antelopes. In Nguila a story started by telling of a small boy who was the guard of all the animals. His name was Nanga and every day he walked a long distance to look for food. When he came back with the food he gave it to all sorts of animals, like the lion and the elephant. Every day the animals ate his food but they gave nothing back to the boy. The boy did not expect anything either. One day the boy got caught by a monster[4] and was finally saved by the elephant and the lion. He keeps on guarding his animals to this day.

This story may imply that the boy is rewarded for guarding the animals for years without expecting something in return. But surprisingly, the storyteller added a different moral at the end of the story. He says: *"And that is why even if he is very small you always have to respect your chief."* Finally, this moral is thus addressed to the animals to care for the boy (their chief) rather than to the boy to care for the animals.

The idea that nature can help people occurs regularly in stories, including true-life stories. In a story from Maroua, a man took care of a young elephant that was left behind during the annual migration of the elephants in the dry season. During this migration, elephants often destroy the millet fields they encounter. The man was seen as somewhat special by the villagers because he had close contact with the young elephant. The real motive for protecting the animal remained unclear, but apparently he just liked it or felt sorry for it. The following year, the elephants passed again and found their young one. The next

[4] In this case a fictional monster called Meker.

morning, instead of a destroyed field the farmer found a huge pile of millet that was put there by the elephants. From that day onwards he was a very rich man.

There do exist some stories, therefore, that give a positive incentive for protecting nature. You are finally rewarded by nature for your care. Although in this story the man did not know beforehand that he was going to be rewarded, in many other stories this remains ambiguous. It may be noted that this only supports nature protection of the strictly utilistic kind, such as conserving biodiversity for pharmaceutical exploration or the upkeep of fish stocks. I will come back to this in the following sections of this chapter. [5]

6.3.2 Preliminary conclusions: do local stories contain environmental messages?

Having explored the set of stories we can draw some preliminary conclusions concerning environmental messages in stories. It can be seen that in spite of the moralistic character of many stories none of them has a direct lesson that corresponds to the message of the regular environmental or nature conservation organisations. Only a very few stories contain a message of the usefulness of protecting nature for strictly utilistic reasons. Even the stories that start with a problem or statement that seems to be rather environmental finally turn out to be purely social. Apparently, a clear environmental message is not what we should expect from these stories.

Does this mean that local stories are useless for any environmental discourse? This conclusion could be drawn too hastily. There could probably be other, more indirect levels on

[5] It may be interesting to draw attention to a few written stories from the Islamic traditions that have been indicated as 'environmental'. In the 12th century there appeared a so-called ecological fable that was anonymously published in 1978 under the title: *The case of the animals versus man before the king of the Jinn. A tenth-century ecological fable of the pure brethren of Basra.* The story deals particularly with the first theme of this section: nature that asks for attention. In the story the domesticated animals start complaining about being badly treated by people. People say they have the right to use the animals the way they want since animals were created for the sake of serving mankind. Finally this leads to a conflict that has to be solved by the king of the Jinn. In contrast to the stories collected in Cameroon, this story remains focused on this theme until the end. It should be noted, however, that the story merely deals with the problem of domesticated animals. Although later in the story the domesticated animals are supported by the wild animals, no reference is made with respect to other environmental themes such as the danger of extinction of species or the value of the environment, be it eco-centric or anthropocentric. Moreover, at the end the judge gives the right to people citing the Koran about the place that animals have in the universe. The concluding idea is that animals were made to serve mankind. People are free to treat the animals any way they want.

Another story that appears to have environmental value is the story of Hayy ibn Yaqzan. This story tells of the life of a boy who has grown up on an island, completely isolated from the rest of the world. He starts investigating nature, including the determination of animal species and in this way achieves a perfect scientific knowledge of nature. Although the story very much focuses on the beauty of the natural world, no direct references for environmental protection are made, simply because there is no need for it. On the island, nature is flourishing and there is no environmental problem at all.

It should be noted that although environmentalists often refer to messages in old texts such as the Bible, this does not mean that environmental messages are explicitly present in these documents. After all, the environmental movement in Europe has only arisen in the last century, previously no problem had been experienced. Taking fragments from these documents to strengthen one's argument would be probably nothing more than losing yourself in the myth of ecological wisdom (see section 2.5).

which stories can be useful in one way or another. In the following part of this chapter I will further explore the meaningfulness of the stories with respect to the subject of environment in general.

Let me start from the premise that stories provide knowledge. This knowledge is very important for the environmental dialogue. After all, motivations for action are based on knowledge. As explained in section 2.2, I distinguish two levels of knowledge: a concrete level of factual knowledge and a deeper level that contains underlying assumptions related to someone's worldview. Although both levels cannot be clearly separated and definitely influence each other, I will for practical reasons use this division for further discussion starting with the most concrete factual level (informative knowledge). The question is thus what literal and direct information or knowledge can be obtained from stories? I will focus on two different subjects: knowledge about animals and plants, and general knowledge about the environment people are living in.

6.4 Stories and concrete factual environmental knowledge

When comparing factual knowledge in local stories with what is known by supra-locals, there are three possibilities. Assuming that supra-locals build this type of knowledge on science, these three possibilities are: 1) local knowledge agrees with scientific knowledge, 2) local knowledge complements what has not (yet) been discovered by scientists, 3) local knowledge contradicts scientific findings.

Theoretically, only the third case may cause problems for the environmental dialogue. Contradictions between local perceptions and scientific insights may also be caused, however, by perceptions that go beyond the realm of pure factual observation. A story may touch on more spiritual or supra-natural matters and therefore touch on the deeper levels and the assumptions behind it. To give one example, locals describe the behaviour of elephants in Moutourwa (see section 5.5.3) as very human-like, because of the assumption that shapeshifting had taken place.

The factual information that is transmitted by stories is very diverse. It may include simple information about the environment and its characteristics but also more complex issues such as behavioural instructions on how to deal with the environment. An example of the latter is the story in the Far North that explains a certain technique to breed fish (Box 6.3). Information about sensitive issues may also be given in stories, such as in the story in Mindif (section 5.6.5) in which a villager tells how a man developed a way to obtain ivory. It should be clear that this sort of information may promote certain behaviour that could have a positive or negative impact on nature.

Box 6.3: The man with his fishing channel
Guividig: Moussa Aoula, age 20, male, Peul.

Once there was a man who lived with his daughter. Since the village had become too small, they decided to leave and go into the bush. In the bush they found a water hole filled with fish. The water hole became their property. Once they had eaten all the fish they had to look further away for new fish. In the course of time, however, they developed a kind of fishing strategy. They started growing small fish in the water hole in order to have bigger ones later.
One day, the father had to travel. His daughter stayed in order to look after the water hole. Nobody was allowed to touch his fish. Some strangers came to visit the girl but the girl did not have any food to prepare for them. She went to the waterside and called the fish in order to catch one. She called: "Pati pati (small Heterotis niloticus), abo'odi (big Heterotis niloticus), Hiya (Alestus nurse), Goumbouloum (Clarias spp.)." But none of the fish wanted to come. Finally she kneeled at the waterside to clean the dishes. One Pati pati came along to see what she was doing. Suddenly she moved towards it and cut its tail with a knife. She prepared a meal with it.
When the father returned, he asked the girl if there was any news. The girl replied that nothing had happened. The man went to the waterside to see his fish and discovered that one fish had no tail anymore. He became angry and went to his daughter: "Kayamouli, what did you do?"
Finally the girl had to confess.
"Stand up", said the father, "I am going to punish you by selling you. With the money I am going to buy new fish."
The girl started crying but the father took her very far away in his pirogue. Suddenly a mermaid appeared asking the man where he was going to. The man explained that he wanted to sell his daughter. The mermaid said: "Give me your daughter and I'll fill your boat with any fish you like."
So it happened. The mermaid took the daughter under the water and the man returned with his boat full of Hiya. He was very satisfied. But when he arrived at the water hole he saw a lot of birds gathered round it. They had already finished all his fish. He started regretting what he had done to his daughter.

And then there was a man called Kidaf. He was the father of ten children and his wife was pregnant again. He was thinking of how to feed his family. He was the friend of a fish species called Lareau (Heterotis niloticus). One day he said to the fish: "I would like to invite you for a party at my home."
Lareau was very pleased to go but he wondered how to get to the house of Kidaf as there was no water. Kidaf said: "I will solve this problem."
He asked his whole family to help him dig a canal from the river to his house. Once they had finished, he invited his friend and all the other fish to come. While the fish were amusing themselves, Kidaf sent his wife to the beginning of the canal to make a dam to close the canal so they could catch all the fish.
Lareau, however, noticed this and suddenly he understood that it was a trap. He warned all his brothers and all the fish got panicked. They tried to swim as fast as they could to cross the dam, but it was too late. Lareau, however, knew how to jump and jumped into the dam. After three times, the dam broke and all the fish could flee. Lareau jumped out of the water and hit the stomach of the pregnant woman with his tail. After this he left. Because of the blow the woman gave birth to a child that fell right into the water. Kidaf thought it was Lareau falling into the water and with his spear he killed his own child. While retrieving it from the water Kidaf discovered that he had made a big mistake. They cried the whole year long.

6.4.1 Informative knowledge about animals and plants

There are numerous examples in which stories provide knowledge about nature such as characteristics of animal behaviour or the medical properties of plants. This level corresponds to what Medin and Atran (1999) call folkbiology: people's everyday knowledge of the biological world. In some stories it is the principal theme of the story, in other stories it is just a detail that occurs on the way to the main plot. Examples of the latter have already been given in section 5.4.3.3 discussing stories in which animal characters use certain plants to protect themselves against the enemy. The episode is important for the story line but at the same time it informs the listener about the characteristics of a certain plant such as bitter leaves or red colouring.

Stories about animals

Many stories convey information about animals as a main theme. Many examples can be found in the aetiological stories explaining, for instance, why certain birds live in the night, or why elephants are so intelligent. It sometimes leads to less obvious information such as why the kob gives birth to only one offspring per time or why fish fall from the sky when it rains. The first example may provide an extension of scientific knowledge; the second is definitely alien to scientific insights. Some of this knowledge may also have implications for certain action. In the case of the falling fish people may be motivated to fish as soon as the rainy season starts. However, this may be unfavourable according to western insights that say that most fish in floodplains breed in the rainy season (Welcomme, 1979).

Apart from describing animal characteristics, there are also stories that talk about relationships between species. This finally results in what is called taxonomy. A simple aetiological story about a bat, told in the Far North as well as in Central Province, reveals a local deviation of what is scientifically called 'animal'. It led to a lot of discussion especially with my interpreter. The story, discussed already in section 5.4.3.3, tells about a bat that felt ill one day. Based on physical features he was neither recognised to be a bird nor an animal. The poor bat did not get any support and this explains its obscure life. Until today there is the expression: "you are a bat", meaning you are neither traditional nor modern.

The remarkable point in the story is the distinction between birds and animals. Apparently, birds are not animals. The word 'animal', as used in science and covering the whole realm of birds, fish, reptiles, insects and mammals is not the same as in this local story. Although usually translated by 'animal', a better translation would probably be: mammal. To gain more insight into this problem, it was further discussed with the local people. Neither in Fulbe nor in the languages of Central Province did there appear to be a separate word for animal used as a term that covers all fauna[6]. The only general word in the Far North was

[6] After further questioning, the following division could be found in the Far North: *djolli* (birds), *lidi* (fish), *koedje* (mammals), *koedje lade* or *dewri* (wildlife). In Central Province a similar division is made.

Takle Allah, meaning the whole creation (of Allah) including human beings. The local taxonomy being different from the scientific one may provoke misunderstanding. Let me take a very theoretical case in which an area like a national park is created and local people are informed that it is forbidden to kill animals within the boundaries of this park. When using the standard translation, this will not forbid people to fish or catch, for example, ostriches in the park. Of course, in practice people may understand the message but the point I want to make here is that it is not justified to automatically take the scientific framework as a reference point[7]. As we shall see in the next section a similar difference in vocabulary appears to exist with respect to landscape.

Box 6.4: Wild and domesticated animals: the big eating match
Fadare: Kekamla Madandi, age 47, male, Tupuri.

In the beginning all animals were living together in the village. One day the chief wanted to organise a big eating match. The elephant was favourite. None of the animals dared to challenge the elephant. Then the chicken said: I will compete with the elephant." All the animals said: "You? Do you think you can compete with an elephant, you are so small?"
But the chicken said: "Yes, I will do it."
The match started. All the animals were assembled to see the match. When the match started the elephant began eating and eating; everything: big trees and plants. The chicken was just picking a bit here and a bit there. After a while, the elephant was full. "Haven't you had enough, chicken?" But the chicken just went on with picking a bit here and a bit there. The elephant went on eating. After a while he was so full and needed a rest. He sat down and closed his eyes. The chicken just went on picking a bit here and a bit there. You know that if you sleep, flies like to sit on your body and your eyes. Well, suddenly, the chicken saw a fly sitting on the eye of the elephant. "That is also nice", he thought and picked the eye of the elephant. The elephant woke up, shocked. "That chicken keeps on eating and now he is going to eat me!!" The elephant panicked and urged all animals to run away for their lives. The whole village ran away from the chicken. Once far away in the brousse, some animals thought it over. They said that the elephant was just panicking for nothing. They decided to go back to the village. These were the dog, the goat and the cows that live together with people. Others thought the elephant was right. They stayed with the elephant in the brousse forever, like the lion, the hyena and the antelope. From that day on there is a separation, and the elephant is afraid of the chicken.

The most obvious taxonomic distinction in the fauna is not between mammals, birds or fish, however, but between animals from the village (domesticated animals) and animals from the *brousse* (wild animals). Numerous stories from both regions relate how the difference between these two categories has arisen. A very famous story told in both Central Province as well as the Far North is about an eating contest (see box 6.4). The big elephant challenges the other animals to compete with him in eating. Finally, he is surpassed by the

[7] It should be noted that the same kind of misunderstanding may occur between scientists and lay people in the West. In Dutch we also often speak of animals and birds, or: flowers and plants.

chicken that pecks little by little without stopping. When the elephant finally falls asleep, the chicken picks a fly out of the eye of the elephant. The elephant wakes up in panic, thinking that the chicken is eating its eye. It runs away, together with a large group of animals and they have never returned to the village. These animals are the wild animals of today, though formerly living in the village. Remarkably, in this story as well as in the other stories it becomes clear that in the beginning there were only domesticated animals: all animals were living in the village together with people. Because of a problem, some animals have fled, either into the *brousse*, or into the forest. An example of the latter is a story in Central Province about a gorilla that runs away after having got a conflict with his friend the dog. In section 6.5.1., I will come back to the village-*brousse* distinction.
Stories also provide information about the kinship between species. In section 5.4.3.4 I discussed a story about a mother giving birth to different animals. Although the story is most often considered as fiction, it at least indicates a perceived morphological similarity between these species. Moreover, it may indicate a certain notion of kinship and the possibility that certain animal species have originated from others instead of, for instance, the idea that all animals have been simultaneously created by God.

The kinship of species is related to the more general ideas about evolution and origin of species. There are very few stories that refer to this subject. In this context the story told in Box 5.7 about the fish that generate spontaneously in water pools is of interest. According to Kruk (1985: 16) spontaneous generation has also been mentioned in Islamic texts.

Stories about plants

There are also stories providing knowledge about plants although these are far less common. This first of all concerns the name-giving of different species of plants and trees that occur in stories. In annex 4 a list is shown of the different species found in the stories from the Far North. Remarkably, the set of stories collected in Central Province did not provide many specific names.

In some stories typical characteristics of certain plant species are mentioned. In the story about the clever squirrel mentioned at the beginning of this section the listener is informed about specific characteristics of a certain fruit. Similar versions were found about the bark of *Acacia Seyal*. Another example relates that certain species carry fruits that are toxic.

Another issue that people have apparently thought about, is the question how trees reproduce themselves. Most villagers in the Far North believe that this works in a similar way to that in the animal world. There are male and female trees. This distinction can be most easily made on the basis of the fruit the tree carries. For example the Rônier (*Borassus flabelliformis*) bears fruit that looks like a penis. Recognising this distinction, the question is now how do male and female trees meet? This question is not difficult to answer in a forestry environment. The chance to meet is of course much higher in a place where trees occur in higher density (like in Central Province) where trees could even physically touch each other.

In the Far North, however, the way in which trees meet is less obvious. Different versions of a story in the Far North explain that there are some special nights during the year[8] in which male trees start walking to meet female trees. Tree species that are supposed to do so are *Borassus aethiopum*, *Acacia albida* and *Ficus platyphylla*. During such a night the place of the male tree is temporarily unoccupied. If you are courageous you can take over the place of the tree and wait until it returns. Since it really needs its place back in order not to die it will start begging. This will lead to negotiation and you can ask for anything you like. Depending on the species, some of the trees may fulfil any wish you have to regain their place.

The capability of trees to fulfil your wishes is related to the common idea that especially big trees are the residences of spirits. Consequently, trees maintain a relationship with these spirits and can thus use their power in certain cases. This perception is definitely more prominent in the Far North than in Central Province. Since I presume it is related more to the second level of knowledge (the worldview level), I will come back to this theme later (see section 6.8).

6.4.2 Informative knowledge about the landscape

There are several ways in which stories can provide information with respect to the landscape. In this section I shall mention two aspects. In the first place there are specific characteristics in the surrounding landscape that have attracted attention and these are narrated literally in stories. These features are often known as landmarks, such as hills or water streams, but also less notable elements of the landscape may show up in stories, such as a particular tree or stone in the proximity of the village. Listening to these stories may give one information about these landscape elements.[9].

In the second place, it appears worthwhile to look for information about the general types of landscape that usually form the setting of the story. The type of landscape, varying from desert, savannah to forest, is often mentioned literally or could be deduced from other story elements. The two types of landscape information will be discussed successively below.

Information about the function and origin of landmarks

Several stories deal with remarkable landscape elements. Numerous examples have been given in previous sections such as the hill in Zimadou and the peak of Mindif. Most of these stories explain the origin of such a landmark. Zimadou (box 5.15) was formed after a bad act of mankind. The aim to obtain the tree of God led to a disaster of which the hill is merely a souvenir. In the case the peak of Mindif, no information is given about the origin of the

[8] These nights most often coincide with the religious ceremony 'fête de mouton'.

[9] Many of these stories have been elicited by using a PRA technique called environmental mapping. This technique has been described in chapter 3.

landmark. However, the peak fulfils an important function: it provides habitat for God's bird, the Dutal.

In both cases, specific marks in the landscape are directly related to the presence of spiritual or divine powers. Indeed, during environmental mapping sessions, many places in the environment were indicated to be inhabited by spirits. Furthermore, the landscape is often the physical left-over from an important event in the past; such as the Zimado hill and the hill of Nguila. As in many cultures (Kommers, 1994; Osseweijer, 2001) Cameroonians also tend to see the landscape as a book describing their own history.

Apart from these two general observations, I will now focus on a specific example of how stories can provide interesting information about the landscape.

Misreading the Central Cameroonian landscape[10]?

In this subsection I will discuss a specific case in which general landscape information found in stories leads to surprising results, contradicting current scientific insights and expectations. The example concerns the landscape of Central Province.

As described in section 4.1, the landscape of Central Province is characterised by a forest-savannah mosaic. It forms a transition zone between the forest in the south and the savannah in the north of the country. The transition zone is bordered by the Sanaga River, south of which the landscape turns mainly into forest. Traditionally, the mosaic landscape is perceived by many supra-locals as a landscape in the process of degrading. The forest patches are considered to be relics of rainforest that have disappeared because of unsustainable management by people. It is considered to be a typical example of what will happen to the remaining forest in the southern part of Cameroon if man continues to mismanage the environment. It strengthens many environmental NGOs to carry out their work. In the last decade rainforest protection has become big business in Cameroon (though still less than forest destruction).

Listening to stories told in this area may put the picture of a degrading forest into a different light. Let us first consider the most common category of stories: fictional animal stories. As has been explained in section 5.3 the types of animals that occur in stories differ depending on the region. In the small region around the lake in the Far North province of Cameroon, for example, hippopotamus and fish are very common animals in stories whereas they are absent in stories from elsewhere in the province.

Surprisingly, many of the principal animal characters that occur in the stories of Central Cameroon are savannah animals such as the antelope, lion, kob, gazelle and hyena in spite of the fact that nowadays these animals do not occur in the area. This single fact could indicate that people are more familiar with the savannah than with the forest. On the other hand, it should be noted that typical forest animals like the gorilla or the chimpanzee also appear in

[10] The title is borrowed from the book of Fairhead and Leach (1996) *'Misreading the African landscape'*.

stories from Central Province. It is remarkable that there are many stories in which these forest animals initially lived together with other animals including those of the savannah. In some cases it is even literally indicated that they lived in the savannah. These stories then tell that, because of a conflict, these animals have finally fled and found a new habitat where they have stayed ever since. Apparently, in the story context, the habitat of a forest animal is seen as more remote than the savannah.

The presence of these animals in stories could be partly explained by the fact that many inhabitants from the region originally came from the north of Cameroon with the invasion of Islam about 150 years ago (see section 4.3). People from the north could of course have taken the stories with them while migrating, and this may explain the presence of many savannah animals in their stories. Notwithstanding this influence, it should be noted that many fiction stories are mixed with elements from real history such as the names of geographical places. To give an example, a story in Ndjolé about an heroic hunter begins with the description of a large savannah between two villages Bissagne and Mbajana. These villages exist in reality and are situated in the same region as Ndjolé. The savannah is called *Whedome*, and this name is found back in several fiction stories as well. This means that even if these stories have been originally taken from the north they have undergone some modifications and may thus refer to the situation in the Central Province.

In addition, it is interesting to consider real life stories from elderly people in the region. Many of these stories of their childhood during which they hunted such animals as lions and spotted antelopes around their village. This wildlife has now disappeared. Moreover, when interviewing elderly people in the villages they all declare that around their village the forest has increased during the last century. A man from the neighbourhood of Nguila (Baba Lucien, 85, from Yambetta) explained:

"A long time ago the savannah was reserved for hunting. With the help of a lot of men we encircled a large area and then we set fire to it, while singing: "where you are standing now, set it on fire." That is what we did to chase the animals to the middle. The animals outside the circle could also be easily caught because the savannah was already burnt down, so one could see very far. Nowadays, we do not set it on fire. We use other hunting techniques, and we have other activities. That is why the forest is now replacing the savannah."

So far, all these stories give evidence of an increase of forest in the area in the last century. Indeed, it is plausible that 150 years ago people from the northern part of Cameroon initially tended to look for a 'familiar' savannah landscape. The hypothesis that they did so is strengthened by the findings of some anthropologists in Cameroon. They found that during the last decades these people have only recently approached sedentary groups living in the

southern forest to ask for permission to communicate with forest gods they had never encountered before in their lives (Abega[11], pers. comm).

6.4.3 Transformations between people and nature: shapeshifting

After having discussed the informative knowledge found in stories with respect to animals and other aspects of the environment, the final theme I will discuss here regards the relationship between people and their environment including animals.

The most obvious point here is the evanescence of the boundary between animals and people. This can first be seen when considering fiction stories. Many stories deal with animals behaving and acting like humans. This account in the first place for the metaphorical level in which animals represent human characters. Although it provides a natural basis for intertwining these two worlds, it is not merely symbolic. However, non-fiction stories also show that the human world and the natural world are not as separated as perceived in the scientific world. The clearest examples are stories that deal with shapeshifting.

Shapeshifting as a phenomenon is described by many authors in different cultures (Köhler, 2000; Richards, 2000) and may have different contexts. There are different reasons for shapeshifting as well as different categories of transformed animals (see figure 6.1). In the case of Richards in Sierra Leone it is put into a social-political context. This can also be found in many stories in Cameroon. Take, for example, the incident that was discussed in section 5.5.3 about a group of nomadic pastoralists, the Mbororo, and sedentary peasants in the region of Moutourwa. I will discuss it a bit more in detail here[12].

The nomadic pastoralists used to spend the dry season with their cattle in the yaéré, the floodplain of the Logone-Chari. Every year in the rainy season, when the floodplain was inundated, they moved to a camp in the bush near Moutourwa. They always paid tribute to the traditional leader, the Lamido, to gain access to the pastures. There was always a peaceful and reciprocal relationship between the people from the village and the Mbororo. However, in the dry season of 1996 the herders found their camp converted into cotton fields. They immediately complained to the traditional authorities but it appeared that these authorities had not given permission for the clearance of the fields. Customary practices appeared to have been overruled by modern law; the sous-prefet had given permission for the cultivation of cotton, regardless of the nomadic herders. The sous-prefet, who himself appeared to possess one of the new cotton fields, explained to the herders that this was part of a developing policy in which wandering people could not have any rights to the land. Moreover, in the same year, the leader of the big herder group, Issa Djibrilla, was jailed on a charge of cattle theft. Finally the nomadic group was forced to move away without its leader.

[11] Prof. Cecile Abega is one of the most famous anthropologists in Cameroon who has done a lot of research in the area.
[12] The story version is according to the recordings of Van der Ploeg (2001).

Figure 6.1: shapeshifting (poster found on the market in Maroua).

They did so without much resistance. After Issa was bailed out by his family he joined his group stating that they would never return to Moutourwa again. But he added that the sous-prefect would regret his decision. Only two weeks later, a big herd of elephants invaded the village. It was the first time in fifteen years that elephants were spotted near Moutourwa. The elephants walked straight into the village and paused a few minutes in front of the office of the sous-prefect. They displaced some obstacles, including the car of the sous prefet, before going to the rain-fed sorghum fields. However, they did not touch a leaf there. Instead, they continued their way straight to the cotton fields that had caused such turmoil. These fields were completely destroyed. In the morning the elephants vanished, leaving the terrain tramped and barren. After this incident neither the elephants nor the group of Issa Djibrilla were ever seen again in Moutourwa.

For the villagers there was no misunderstanding: the elephants were no ordinary animals on their yearly search for food. This was a typical case of *wailourou*. Mbororo in particular are known to possess the power to transform. Although the story does not literally say that elephants are shapeshifted Mbororo (in fact these elephants can also be seen as animals operating under the command of Mbororo) this is the general conclusion of most people. It agrees with numerous other stories in which elephants or lions have characteristics that betray their human origin or even stories in which people have witnessed the moment of transformation. The story of Moutourwa perfectly illustrates the role of animals in political issues. Many other stories abound in which on an individual level or a more general level people have been transformed into animals in order to take revenge or solve a conflict. This includes animals destroying crops or attacking people.

Shapeshifting is only one of the common beliefs that show the indistinct boundary between the cultural world and the natural world. Another example is the common phenomenon of *mysteridjo*, of which the origin is discussed in chapter 5.

The fact that it is commonly believed that animals and humans can transform into each other is of course directly linked with a deeper level of knowledge with respect to the position of people and the environment. Moreover, as we shall see, this knowledge strongly influences the ideas on environmental conservation. Environmental issues cannot be considered as separated from what happens in the social world. I will return to this theme in later sections of this chapter.

In this section I have discussed some issues that are related with the level of concrete knowledge. In the next sections I will deal with the deeper level of knowledge relating to worldview and underlying assumptions. In order to do so, I have made a thematic division partly inspired by the questions of Milton (section 2.6). In the first place, it may be useful to consider the concept of place and time in local stories. Furthermore, I will discuss two basic emotional values: care and compassion on the one hand, and respect and fear on the other. Finally, I will deal with the issue of responsibility.

6.5 The concept of place in stories: culture versus nature; village versus wilderness

6.5.1 General place indications in stories

In this section I will further discuss the role and definition of place in stories. Most stories in Cameroon contain indications of place. The most common places mentioned are the 'village' and the so-called 'brousse'. The word 'brousse' (called 'Ladé' in Fululdé, for Central Province see next section) seems to replace any concept similar to 'nature' or 'environment' (these words have never been found in stories). Moreover, local vocabulary shows that there is no separate word for nature or environment.

The word brousse appears to be a quite undefined concept. For people living in Maroua or Yaounde, almost everything that does not belong to the city, including villages in the countryside, are indicated as brousse. The popular 'taxi-brousse' connects all these places around the town. However, for people living in the villages, the real brousse is more remote, less accessible for people, and as a consequence it is the realm of many occult powers and super natural creatures.

Most stories thus include the place indications 'brousse' and 'village'. Indeed, this is what often marks the clear distinction between two entire worlds. The village is the place where human cultural life takes place and ordinary rules are in force. The brousse, however, is the place were unusual events take place. It is the home of undomesticated animals as well as the place of witchcraft. In addition, it is the place of some initiation rituals. The distinction between 'brousse' and 'village' is perfectly illustrated in the many stories about a beautiful girl (often the daughter of a chief) who finally chooses her husband. After the marriage they leave for the house of the husband which turns out to be located in the brousse. This already indicates what will happen further on in the story: the husband turns out to be a *wailourou* and once arriving at his house, he transforms into a snake or hyena, imprisoning the girl for the rest of her life. Apart from these fairy tales, which are probably akin to some of those in Europe, there are also true stories about people who have been disappeared in the brousse. In the exceptional case in which they have returned, they appeared to have lived with such a *wailourou* and now often possess supernatural powers. In the zone of Guirvidig, similar stories were found in which the lake has a similar function as the brousse. Several stories were found about fishermen who have been kidnapped by mermaids locally called *mamiwatas*[13]. After living for several years in the underwater realm of the *mamiwata* some managed to escape and return to the human world[14].

[13] A *mamiwata* is the most common form of a water spirit. It has the shape of a mermaid. See for extensive information the student report of Molenaar (in Press).

[14] Van Beek has extensively worked out this dichotomy for the Dogon in Mali. Among the Dogon, the brousse is the place were life forces emerge and these forces dissipate in the village.

The emphasis on village and brousse in stories agrees with the findings of many authors in West-Africa (e.g. Luning 1991): it reflects the same distinction between village and bush as found by Van Beek and Banga (1992) in Mali, by Van den Breemer (1984) in Ivory Coast and Zanen (1996) in Bukina Faso. The location of village and brousse is clearly expressed in the ideas of local people from the Far North. If we take, for example, the story about the end of the world (box 5.11; section 5.6.4) we see the image of the world as a mat that is rolled up by Allah. This example refers to the traditional worldview in which the earth is perceived to be flat. When discussing this with younger villagers who go to school they answered: "*at school we learn that the world is a globe but since we have to respect our elders I do not tell my parents these things*."

This worldview supports a concentric perception of the earth. At the centre is the human sphere (e.g. the village), and the more you get to the edge, the more the world becomes inaccessible for people. Although the boundaries between village and brousse may move, and, for example, animals that belong to the brousse could nowadays not be found around the village, there is always brousse at the edge. This view implies that there will always be a place for the brousse.

Related to this distinction between village and brousse and related to the idea that everything emerges from the village as a central point, there is also the distinction between animals from the village and animals from the brousse, or in other words: domesticated animals and wild animals. There are several stories that tend to explain the existence and origin of these two distinct categories. One such story (box 6.4) explains how wild animals have evolved from other animals. It should be pointed out that this story, as well as other stories, take the civilised world as a starting-point: in the beginning all animals used to live in the village[15]. Because of an incident, the situation changed and the animals had to run away from the village. Finally the group that settled elsewhere received the name of *Koedje Lade*: animals of the brousse.

The place indication between village and brousse can thus be considered to be the basis for many stories. Besides this and less frequently, locations such as rivers and mountains occur in stories. As we have seen, these indications often relate to landmarks in the direct environment. Moreover, in Central Province there is a remarkable sub-division of the brousse that was not found in the Far North. This will be discussed in the next section.

6.5.2 The forest and the savannah

Apart from the most obvious distinction between brousse and village, there is a more detailed distinction found in Central Province. This concerns a further sub-division of the concept of the brousse. As we know, the landscape consists of a forest-savannah mosaic, and the stories indicate that savannah is more familiar to local people. As discussed in section 6.4.2., in

[15] This tends to contradict the idea of the Dogon that the brousse is the place where the life forces emerge.

many stories a distinction is made between forest and savannah. However, linguistically, both concepts are not simply a sub-category of the brousse. It is important to have a short look at the vocabulary of the two main languages spoken in Central Province: Babouti and Baveck. In neither of these languages is there a distinct word for forest. The equivalent for 'forêt' is the same as the word for 'brousse': *kain* in Babouti and *apan* in Baveck, whereas both languages do have a separate word for savannah: *ngouari* in Babouti, and *nsane* in Baveck. Hence basically, "going into the forest" means the same as "going into the bush" or "going hunting".

The ambiguous meaning of the word *kain* or *apan* caused a lot of misunderstanding between me and my translator. I asked him the question how could he know which translation to choose in a specific story. It turned out that the meaning of the concept depends on its counterpart. Contrasted with savannah it is translated as forest, contrasted with village it is translated as brousse.

However, the misunderstanding did not only show up in my attempts to understand a local logic. Younger generations appeared to have difficulties with it as well. Take for example the different stories told about a lion. In a village a young boy told a story about a lion living in the *kain* while an elder told the same story using the word *ngouari.* This implies that the older generation knows that a lion lives in the savannah (probably based on personal experience) whereas to the younger generation this strange animal belongs to some general brousse far away. The younger boy automatically used the word *kain*, sometimes mistakenly translated as 'forêt' by storytellers who related the story in French.

Apart from words to indicate forest (or brousse) and savannah, there are some indications of specific landscape sites that have their own name. Interestingly, this especially concerns sacred forests. In these cases the local term refers to forest rather than brousse, as it is described as a place as opposed to savannah. The name of the village Nguila, for example, means sacred forest (and not sacred brousse). It refers to the inaccessible forest that is located on the north side of the village. Around Ndjolé, there is also a sacred forest. A villager said of this: "*before, there was savannah everywhere with the exception of the sacred forest: forêt Yadjongo. The sacred forest is not open for hunting. The animals have withdrawn into this forest."*

Also in fiction stories special names are used. As in non-fiction stories, most forests (as indicated by detailed descriptions) have special proper names, such as *Baliki*, whereas savannahs do not. Apparently, forests are perceived to be more exclusive than savannah. This may confirm the words of this villager, indicating that in former times forest was less common than savannah.

Finally, to round off this section, table 6.1 gives an overview of the place indicators that can be found in the stories of both Central Province as well as the Far North.

	Brousse	Village	Savannah	Forest	Mountain	River
Far North	67	79	Not applicable	Not applicable	7	25
Central	59	99	28	See brousse	7	26

Table 6.1: Place indicators in stories in the Far North (n= 241) and Central Province (n=214).

6.6 The concept of time in stories

6.6.1 Time indicators in stories

The second basic concept is that of time. In contrast to place, time indications are far less common in stories. Although the majority of the stories were told in the past tense, they only refer to an unspecified moment in the past. Indications of this undefined moment were sometimes given in the opening, comparable to the 'once upon a time', used in Western fairy tales. Other storytellers do not use time indications in the beginning but rather at the end of the story, for example by concluding a story with: "*…and from that day on*…"

The general absence of time indication in stories may indicate that absolute time is not perceived as a major point of relevance. Instead, more attention is paid to the sequence and mutual relationship between the different events in a story. The only concrete time variable that is often used is whether it is in the rainy season or in the dry season. If people tell true historical stories they more often indicate whether it happened in the dry or the rainy season than the exact number of years ago that the event happened. This could indicate a different time perspective from the linear one, which is prominent in many western societies. However, as has been indicated by many authors (Leach, 1961; Persoon & Van Est, 2000) this does not automatically imply that it is a cyclical time perspective; the division between linear and cyclical is probably oversimplified. Instead, I suggest that in cultures linear and cyclical perceptions of time can exist simultaneously. In the collected stories, next to cyclical notions the historical (linear) time perception is also present though less relevant and less specified than in western thinking.

An exception to irrelevance of historical time is seen, of course, in the stories that deal with the element of time as a subject, or more specifically: the stories about the beginning and the end of the world. However, these stories still do not indicate specific moments that could be found back in either the Gregorian calendar or any other equivalent. They refer to an undefined moment either in the past or in the future.

With respect to the past, people appear to have a specific kind of knowledge. During interviews, the past is generally presented as a time in which there was more harmony, morality and power. As a consequence of good social behaviour, there was more abundance in the environment. If we again take the example of the peak of Mindif, the presence of

animals around this peak is directly linked to the social behaviour of people, in this case represented by the life of Modibo.

Analysing the other time stories, eschatologies, we can conclude that these are largely based on Islamic and Christian traditions. As has already been discussed in section 5.6.4 the end is in the hands of God, and insofar as it is not a predestined process, it depends on the social and moral behaviour of people. The end is, as it were, a final correction of what was lost from the past. However, the precise moment when this will happen is unknown. The future is extendable. There is no defined time limit within which things should happen. The world will simply end if God decides.

The concept of future is perceived to be especially important for the environmental debate (Persoon & Van Est, 2000). Probably the most important aspect of future is the concept of change. Do people think events are irreversible? Do small events today have their influence on the long term? This will be discussed in the next section.

6.6.2 The concept of change

Related to the concept of time is the concept of change in stories. Let me first consider this concept in the stories in general. As we have seen from the database of stories in Cameroon most fictional stories tend to focus on a stable set of codes and rules that are clearly defined by the past. Most of these stories contain moral lessons. These lessons need to be obeyed in order to avoid problems. Many physical features, like characteristics of animals are used in aetiological stories to emphasise the importance of these rules. The main purpose of most stories is thus to keep the status quo in the present society (Schipper, 1990b). As a consequence, these stories do not pay much attention to possible changes.

When changes are discussed in stories, they usually concern the group of mythical stories, in particular eschatologies, and historical stories.

As is the case in many eschatologies in other cultures, in these stories changes often take place quite abruptly and may have a high impact on human society and the environment. The eschatology mentioned in section 5.6.4, box 5.11, is a mechanical description of what will happen when the world ends. It does not say anything about the role of human beings in this process. However, there appear to exist other stories in which an answer is give to the question of what causes such an end to the world. It should be noted, however, that in all cases these changes linked with such a *darngal* are meant to correct human behaviour that apparently deviated too much from the original reference. The causes of a certain change in the environment, like the eclipse of the moon, a sand storm or the invasion of a group of elephants are mostly perceived to be acts of god or spirits in order to correct people's behaviour. This behaviour may be in the realm of disrespect for children, for food or for God. Take the example of the creation of the hill in Zimadou (see box 5.15). This change in the landscape has been evoked by too much curiosity by the people for the secrets of God. This example may perfectly illustrate the main trend found in fiction stories. Things do not need to

change. Quite the contrary, changes are only there as an indirect consequence of people's bad behaviour, as a way to take revenge or to punish and correct people's immoral behaviour.

On the other hand, when considering the historical stories, people do appear to be aware of changes other than catastrophic ones in the past or future. These changes are more gradual and take place on a concrete imaginable time-scale. The most obvious example is the already discussed dynamics of landscape change in the forest-savannah mosaic in Central Cameroon as perceived by the local people. As has been explained in section 6.4.2., most villagers are perfectly aware of a changing landscape during the last century. Moreover, the citation of Baba Lucien in section 6.4.2. shows even a direct link between human behaviour and environmental change: fire setting for hunting impedes the growth of the forest. This direct and visible link is totally different from the rather indirect and abstract level of human influence on the environmental change as was explained in the eschatologies. The change from savannah to forest is not related to a judgement about good and bad like in the case of two other categories of stories in which changes were perceived to be punishments. When asking people in Central Province which type of landscape they prefer there was no unanimous answer. People were able to give as many advantages as disadvantages with respect to forest and savannah, and no conclusions were drawn with respect to consequences for human behaviour.

In some cases, however, gradual changes are perceived to be degradation. After all, people often indicate that in the past things were much better. A second example of gradual change, found both in the Far North and in Central Province, is the idea that in earlier times there were more wild animals around the village. Nowadays these animals are perceived to live further away from the villages. Several explanations are given for this phenomenon. In many cases it is linked to social changes: animals do not like the way people act today and have thus moved elsewhere. Interestingly, the dislike expressed by the animals is not necessarily because humans directly threaten them. The birds of Mindif, for instance, have left for other reasons. Another explanation for the decline of wildlife, which was often heard in Central Province, was that nowadays there are no powerful persons anymore in the society. These powerful people were responsible for the existence of totems, which represented a part of the wild animal population. Today, the population of wild animals has decreased because of a decrease of totems.

Concluding this section, one could say that with respect to change different categories of stories have different messages. Fictional stories in general disregard changes, mythological stories deal with changes in an abstract and catastrophic way, usually linked with people's bad social behaviour. Historical stories often deal with changes in a more progressive way without indicating a clear idea about good or bad. If there is judgement and things are perceived to be degrading, as in the case of the disappearance of animals, this is explained in the same way as eschatologies explain changes: it is caused by immoral human behaviour.

However, as we shall see later, this immoral behaviour is not the same as immoral behaviour as perceived by supra-local environmentalists.

6.7 The concept of care or compassion in stories

After we have discussed the two basic concepts of place and time in stories, let us now further analyse some themes that are prominent in stories and that may play an important role in the environmental debate. The first theme I will discuss here is the concept of care or compassion in stories. I will discuss the two concepts together. Although care could be taken without having compassion, I presume them to be closely linked.

This concerns in the first place the care for environmental elements such as animals and plants. This idea is, of course, directly linked with the need for environmental conservation or nature. It refers to the second question posed by Milton in section 2.6. Nature needs to be protected because it is endangered. But what concrete information can local stories give about this?

Let me first focus on the concept of compassion for animals in stories. The feeling of compassion is impossible without the faculty to place oneself in the position of the other. This faculty definitely appears to exist among people in Cameroon since in most fiction stories, animals feel, act and think like man. Therefore animals in stories also feel moments of trouble in which they need help or in which they are really victims. It should be noted, however, that these notions are, of course, in the first place metaphors for human feelings and problems rather than true characteristics attributed to animals. For the same reason, animals are also able to help each other or to collaborate in the way human beings do.

However, apart from fictional stories, this collaboration is also perceived in real life. Good observations of local people have led to the information that in nature some animals use each other, for example the so-called ‘guardian bird’ that always keeps company with large animals such as cattle or wildlife. Many villagers in the Far North know that this is a reciprocal relationship in which both parties profit: the bird gets its food by eliminating the insects that would otherwise bother the animal. On a more spiritual level there are also stories about invisible creatures that live with animals and protect them. An example is the story (box 6.5) about a little dwarf that always goes with a buffalo herd and that is supposed to possess magic power to protect the herd from predation.

People are thus able to imagine how animals would feel. The next question would be, does this lead to feelings of compassion and if so, in which situation? Let us first look at the position of victims in fiction stories. As has been explained in section 5.4, animals have several characteristics and because of this certain animals always get into trouble. Remarkably, most typical victims in stories, like the hyena or the panther, are perceived to be ridiculous creatures by the audience. Stories about these characters are an excellent recipe for success (*i.e.* a laughing or animated audience) of the storyteller. It does not at all link to a feeling of compassion or respect for these animals.

Box 6.5: Nanga protecting the animals
Nguila: Elvis, age 26, male, Babouti.

Once there was a little boy. He was guarding all the animals, all species. Elephants, lions, panther, all sorts of animals. The animal that guards all these animals is called Nanga. The boy who guarded every morning went looking for food, very far, sometime as far as Ntui, sometimes to Oba. If he was sure he had found enough food he blew on his horn and the animals carried the food home, and put it in front of the house of the chief. The lion and the elephant took away the food without giving anything to their chief. So one day, the chief went looking for food and he met a gang of ogres. The ogres said: "Ah we have often heard talking about you, it is you we are looking for. We will eat you." What could he do, except run away. He ran a very long time until arriving at a fromagier. There he took his grisgris and beat it against the fromagier. It became small and he climbed in it. He beat again and it became big again. The Ogres smelled him and went turning around the fromagier tree without seeing him. They looked up because of the smell and discovered him. "Ah, there he is!" So they started cutting the tree, but the fromagier tree did not fall. The boy took his horn and started singing. Nanga was sleeping very deeply so he did not hear. The other animals did and tried to wake up Nanga but… no way. The Ogres kept on cutting.. Just when the tree wanted to fall, Nanga woke up. So the animals had caught all the orges and killed them. The boy used his grisgris to make the fromagier tree small to get out of it. He went back with his animals. He kept on guarding them like he always did. That is why they say that if someone is your chief, even if he is small you have to respect him.

On the other hand, there are also a few common stories that do touch on the feeling of compassion, especially between human beings and animals. A beautiful example is the story heard in Pette about a hunter who meets the last Buffon's kob (see 6.3.1) who begs the hunter to have mercy on her. However, as we have seen, the story does not tell us much about compassion. After being mentioned, the theme is not further worked out.[16]

An other example concerns the non-fiction story of the villager who decided to take care of the elephant baby (see section 6.3.1). This was a good deed and it was rewarded by the elephants. Apart from the fact that the story suggests a certain compassion by the villager for the animal, it shows the idea that animals, just as human beings, need care.

There appears thus to be a strange contradiction. The possibility of animals to express their feelings in stories is very helpful in also expressing their needs. This would support the eco-centric worldview in which animals need a party that supports their rights. In that sense stories could act as a mouthpiece for these animal rights. However, as most of these stories

[16] The concept of compassion is also strongly related to love. Like compassion, this theme was not found in stories. In spite of the absence of this theme in most of the stories, it does play a prominent role in some stories that are more linked with initiation rituals, hence stories not collected by me. This includes of course stories that are linked with religion such as the Bible or the Koran but also the traditional story of the *Mvet* as discussed in section 5.6.3 which links love with beauty.

conclude, animals do not seek their rights by claiming their helplessness. On the contrary, most animals are perceived to be totally capable of running their own lives. Stories may represent the voice of the animals, but do not communicate the message of their poor and helpless position.

This becomes most clear when considering the extreme case of helplessness or vulnerability of nature: the notion of extinction of species. According to common conservationist ideas, if mankind does not protect certain animal species, they may become extinct in the near future. In spite of the story about the last kob, the idea of animal extinction is absent from local perception. Although villagers have noted that certain animals do not occur anymore in their environment, such as the elder villagers in Nguila who state that there are no longer lions and elephants around the village, the general idea is not that these animals have become extinct, they have simply moved elsewhere. This also fits into the idea of a flat world with the village in the centre: there is always brousse at the edge and thus there is always a place for nature. Since this place is inaccessible for people, it is assumed that there will always be a place where animals can hide. The impossibility of extinction also maintains validity because there are many alternative explanations for the disappearance of certain animals. As has been discussed the decline of wildlife is directly related to the decline of powerful people in a society. To cite a villager from Nguila: *"Before, people transformed into a panther. They could be recognised since they wear a chain. But they don't come here anymore. The witches stay far from here, they don't come to the village. But if you go hunting far away you will meet them: the panther, the lion and the hyena."*

The findings in stories about the capability of animals to look after themselves may coincide quite well with the daily experience of people in Cameroon. I remember one day I was translating a text with my interpreter in a room in Yaounde. All of a sudden, a bird flew into the open window. The interpreter caught the bird and started to play and laugh with it. In spite of my impulsive reaction of compassion -I wanted to take care of the bird and make sure he was not wounded- the man kept on teasing the bird. This finally ended up in a discussion about how to deal with the bird. My interpreter answered: *"Do you really think this bird needs help? They are capable enough of taking care of themselves. Besides you never know whether it is an ordinary bird or a witch. It may even harm you."*

The examples mentioned show that in general people do feel not much compassion towards animals[17]. The need to take care of animals such as keeping domesticated animals is not very much part of the Cameroonian culture. Animals, such as dogs, may be kept in households but they primarily fulfil a guarding function. They are never caressed as is the case in many western societies. The same counts for other elements of nature such as trees. As we may conclude, the protection of the rainforest is not an issue for people who perceive the forest as expanding. A local woodcutter from Nguila said: *"Of course I like the forest, but*

[17] Instead, they are much more concerned about people. As a colleague in Yaoundé said: " You people care so much about animals but what about the poor and helpless people in your society?"

therefore I like to work in it. I do not feel the danger of a disappearing forest. The forest and its powers will always be able to overrule man."

Indeed, there are many stories both in the Far North as well as in Central Province in which nature is able to fight back if it is too threatened by people. Some old trees provide shelter for spirits that will definitely take revenge if the tree is cut. In the Far North fear rather than compassion impedes people from cutting mostly old trees.

Finally, the question may be asked whether the landscape itself is perceived to be vulnerable? This can best be illustrated by the major change after the construction of the dam in the Far North of Cameroon. This dam had major consequences for the floods in the region (see chapter 4). As a consequence the region lost its major floods. This resulted in many environmental changes such as change in vegetation and soil fertility. According to most villagers in the region, this event did not take place without much resistance by the environment itself. Many stories have been told about spirits in the water that fought against people from the Semry rice project to avoid human intervention (Zwaal, 1997).

Concluding this section, it could be said that the idea of compassion and care is not prominent in stories. Nevertheless, people are well able to imagine that animals can feel pain or trouble. There are also some remarkable exceptions in which people decided not to kill an animal or even to protect it. Interestingly, this behaviour was always rewarded in the end. In some cases (such as the example in section 6.3 of the bird that saved the boy from the ogress) nature appeared to be able to take care of human beings as well. This may imply incidental relations based on reciprocity between nature and individuals. In spite of some exceptions it emphasises that nature is in general supposed to be powerful enough to take care of itself. This is directly related to the theme of respect and fear for the environment. This will be discussed in the next section.

6.8 The concept of respect or fear in stories

The subtle difference between care and compassion may have its counterpart in the concepts of respect and fear. Compassion could be seen as an extreme incentive for care, whereas fear could be seen as an extreme incentive for having respect. At the same time, one could well feel the need to take care of something that at the same time evokes respect. Respect for other people's norms and values, for example, means that we want to conserve these at the same time. It becomes more difficult, however, with the combination of compassion and fear. It seems rather unnatural to feel compassion for something that one fears at the same time.

Like care and compassion, the themes of respect and fear needs to be further investigated. Whereas compassion and care are largely absent issues in stories in Cameroon, the themes of respect or fear are highly present. Many stories contain principles of dealing with elements that command respect. These stories often deal with heroic actions of people in relation to the environment. In metaphoric stories it is presented by animal characters, and in

true-life stories it is presented by people themselves. Both the storyteller and the audience love heroes. The hare, for example, that has experienced the dangers of the hyena, is honoured when he manages to cut off the hyena's tail. Instead of compassion for the hyena, these stories always unleash laughter among the audience or applause for the hare. People definitely choose the side of the hero. The same counts for true-life stories. There are many stories about hunters that encounter wild animals and put themselves in a dangerous position. In a true-life story, the hunter is always celebrated when he finally manages to shoot the animal. This general idea about brave hunters and dangerous animals is beautifully illustrated by posters that are widespread in the markets in Cameroon (see figure 6.2).

The respect for nature, in a sense that people esteem nature to be strong and overwhelming, easily takes the rather extreme form of fear. Fear is one of the major powers in stories, and fear for environmental powers is one of the most prominent of these fears. These fears include in the first place natural dangers people encounter every day, such as the threat of wild animals. In the Far North of Cameroon there are yearly reports of people killed by elephants or lions. In Central Province, stories abound about people killed by buffaloes. Furthermore, in both regions snake bites or scorpion stings are frequently mortal for people.

Not only are natural dangers operating but probably most important are the invisible powers that are hidden everywhere in the environment. The environment is not just the forest and the animals, it is a world full of spirits, totems, ancestors and shapeshifted witches that all have their own relationship with people. The hedgehog, for example, is known as a danger that often comes to destroy your field. It is known to be a kind of animal that people from the village often like to manipulate. Apart from transforming into such an animal, women can also use natural hedgehogs to destroy the crops of their co-wives.

Within this framework it may be interesting to consider a group of aetiological stories that explain the origin of some of the general threats people experience from nature today. These stories do not deal with specific situations in which Mbororo may have transformed themselves into elephants, but instead explain common and general natural phenomena. The aetiological stories were found both in Central Province as well as in the Far North. Table 6.2 shows the subject of the specific stories.

Although these stories differ a lot, they have one main thing in common: in the beginning there was no problem and it is because of a human fault or misbehaviour that the situation has changed. The story about the elephants destroying the millet fields, for example, explains that God decided to give a present to the elephant because he was considered it to be the pearl of his creation. Mankind cheated God, however, and took away the present, which happened to be the millet. The tendency of elephants to destroy millet fields is in the story nothing more than trying to retrieve the present that was supposed to be theirs. The story thus completely justifies the behaviour of the elephants.

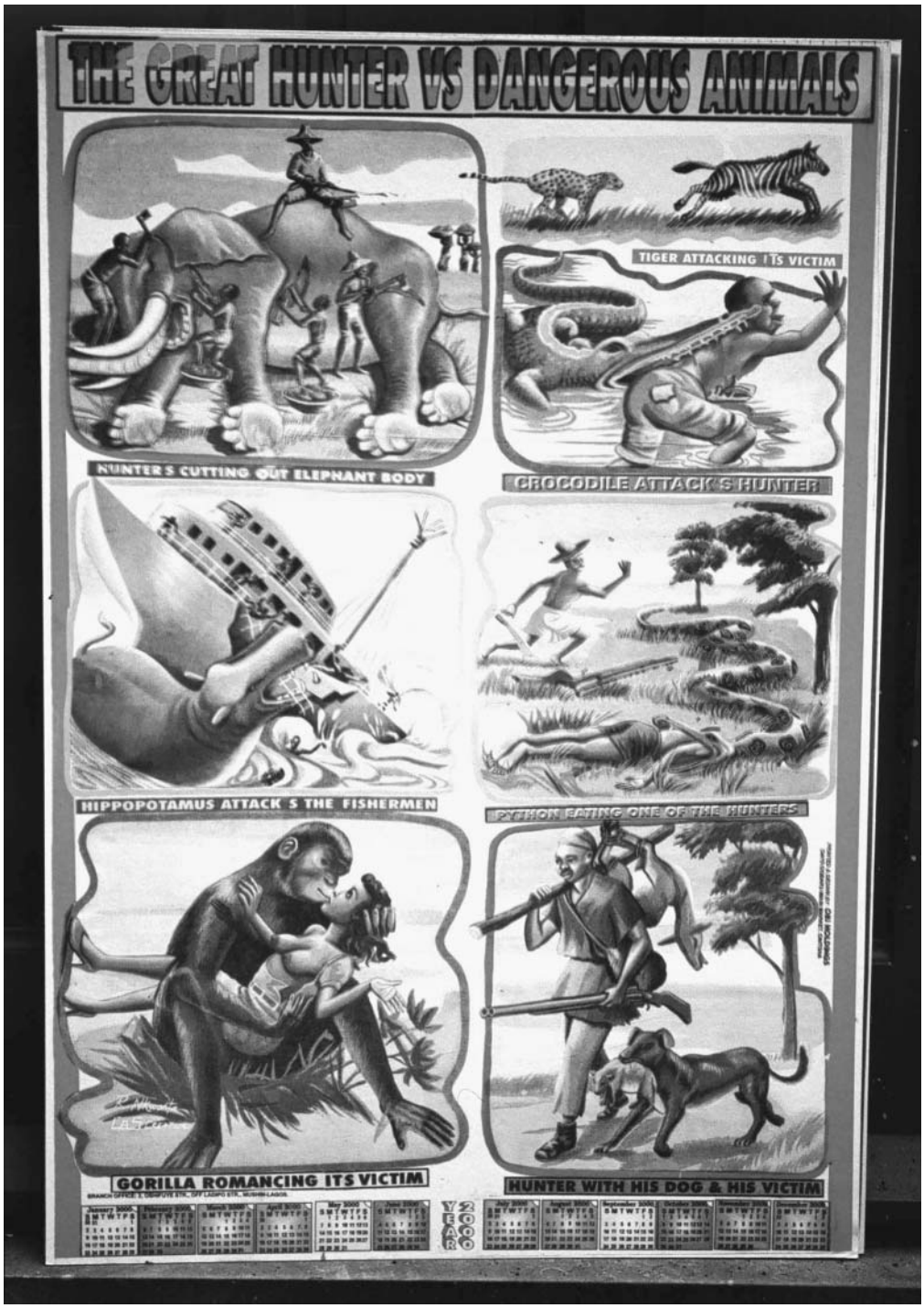


Figure 6.2.: brave hunters versus dangerous animals (poster found on market in Far North province)

Their behaviour is even more justified according to another short 'why-story' in the Far North which explains why elephants only give birth to one child (see section 6.3). The reason is precisely because otherwise there would be too many elephants and they would finish all the millet and therefore there would be nothing left for the people. Thus, people should be happy that elephants take into account their problem too. Otherwise they could have wiped out human life completely.

Stories in Far North	**Stories in Central**
Why elephants destroy the millet crops	Why snakes bite people
Why lions kill cattle	Why there are less animals today[18]
Why there exist venomous animals	
Why the sky is far away[19]	

Table 6.2: aetiological stories explaining the origin of natural threats

The story of the venomous animals is particular in the sense that it deals with animals that at a certain moment started to feel too dominated by people. In order to eliminate people they created a magic potion in a kettle meant to kill them. Two domesticated animals[20] wanted to impede the action, however, because they knew they depended on people for their food. They finally simulated a quarrel during which they pushed over the kettle. The magic potion was spread over the ground and in a panic, the animals jumped in the liquid to conserve some of the magic and several of them had parts of their bodies impregnated with it. This explains venomous tails, stings and mouths. The cause of this event is thus laid in the fact that animals at a certain moment felt that people overruled them. Naturally, they wanted to take revenge.

Considering these aetiological stories we see probably the same thing as with the end-of-the-world stories: if mankind behaves well, there is no end to the world, and there will be no problems with the environment. If mankind does not behave well, he will be reprimanded somehow. This implies that threats from nature occur as revenge or to correct people. Nature is usually not threatening people without a reason or just because it enjoys to do so. Moreover, nature sometimes appears to show mercy. After all, the elephants in the example above, could have destroyed mankind but they decided not to do so.

[18] This could be see as a threat since people depend on hunting practices.
[19] This is considered to be a less harmonious situation than before, when they were together and one could interact with it.
[20] In some stories it is the monkey (who eats from the fields) and the pigeon, in other stories the monkey and the dog.

Concluding this section it could be said that respect, and even more important: fear, is the driving force in many stories. Many stories deal with dangers people may encounter from the environment. Nature is often represented as unpredictable in stories but at the same time there are many stories in which the treats of nature are put into a context. Here, there is no clear distinction between nature and culture. Generally speaking, nature acts according to the same norms that most people follow. In daily life, naughty children get punished by their parents as everywhere. In adult life, disobedience is sometimes punished by the environment. The environment somehow reflects social life. It is an expression of either humanlike creatures such as ancestors or shapeshifters, or of the overwhelming divine forces themselves, such as in the case of many aetiological stories. The former often operate on an individual level, the latter on a more general level. Besides that this strongly indicates the false dichotomy between nature and culture, it shows that fear and respect are perceived to have a stabilising influence on people's behaviour.

6.9 Authority, tradition and the challenge of active thinking

In the previous sections I have analysed the set of stories in order to extract some general ideas from it. The final point to discuss in this chapter is the question in what way the messages from stories influence people's motivation for a specific behaviour. This is important for our final discourse, and links up to the second set of questions posed by Milton, those that deal with responsibility.

As we may conclude from the previous sections, most stories are punctuated with messages that tell the audience to obey certain rules. In fact, this is precisely what the main role of stories is according to several authors (e.g. Schipper, 1990b). The moral is often expressed or repeated literally at the end of the story, but it may also be implicit. Fear and punishment are the main driving forces behind keeping the order, and many directly perceivable phenomena in the environment help us to remember this morality every day. Furthermore, most stories have a closed end and do not expect the audience to react. In this way even inconsistent or unclear messages have to be accepted, just by saying that that is the way it is or the way it was taught by the ancestors. Elder people can play an important role here, confirming the role of authority. Authority has always been an important element of most African societies and can be found back in daily life all over Cameroon. It has been perfectly taken over by the French who have based many structures on this principle of hierarchy and authority.

Although obedience to authorities and hierarchic structures may be very helpful in keeping a society together, many people also see the disadvantage of it. On a political level this is strongly expressed by people advocating the development of democracy in Africa. It is often stated that Africa needs democracy in order to finally become autonomous. This means in the first place that people should be allowed to express their own ideas, even if they do not fit the traditional system.

On a more philosophical level this problem of authority is also discussed. One of the most famous philosophers of Cameroon, and probably of West Africa, Marcien Towa has written about the subject of philosophy and power. In his book: *"L' idée d'une philosophie négro-africaine"* (1979), he raises the concept of 'pensée active' that I will translate henceforth by 'active thinking'. According to Towa, active thinking is one of the most fundamental needs in Africa. People need to develop their own ideas irrespective of power, be it political, religious or cultural. Towa finds that today, most people in Africa, especially traditionally educated people, lack this ability of active thinking.

Active thinking has played an important role in the history of the Western world. Starting in Greece with the Presocratics (Popper, 1989) and later expressed in the age of the Enlightenment in which rationalism replaced many traditions that were based on the doctrines of the church. People finally managed to break free of dogmas that were formerly maintained through fear of the judgement of God. Furthermore, the development of science and philosophy made it possible to explore autonomously the truths and values of the world and to contest ancient ideas. As Popper (1989) states in his book about the growth of scientific knowledge (p.152): "theory proceeds by way of conjectures and refutations." As I will discuss later in my dissertation, the ideas coming out of this turn in history have had much influence on present day thinking, including the ideas that are at the heart of the Western environmentalism movement.

To create a basis for dialogue on environmentalism it is important to investigate indications for potential active thinking in Cameroon (and of course in whole Africa). It may therefore be relevant to explore the role that stories could play in the process of active thinking.

As we have concluded, at first sight it seems that most stories do not contribute much to active thinking. On the contrary, they work in a conservative way, not allowing objections or contradictions and being clear in their punishment and reward. However, Towa states that active thinking does exist in the African traditions. With active thinking, Towa especially refers to the power of rationality and with this he opposes against many authors who have stated that African people lack rationality. Probably, the most prominent example of these authors is found in the literary movement: *la negritude*, initiated by the ideas of Senghor. Senghor stated that African people are essentially emotional and religious whereas Europeans are essentially rational. Towa, who is publicly known as the counterpart of Senghor, states that while Senghor wanted to strengthen the status of Africans by emphasising their difference and stimulating these differences, in reality this had only confirmed racism. According to Towa, active thinking based on argumentation and reflection, certainly does exist in African traditions but has been repressed by several factors, among others the influence of world religions and, related to this, the process of colonisation.

In several publications Towa shows that there are quite some exceptions to the general tendency of African stories being conservative and repressing active thinking. Since I will

use his ideas later in this dissertation, I will discuss these exceptions here. Based on Towa's work, we could seek exceptions on two levels: in the traditions in which storytelling originally took part, and exceptions in the realm of stories itself.

With respect to the first part, it could be assumed that most stories originally did not stand by themselves. They rather belonged to a wider tradition. In this tradition, most of the common stories, which can be heard all over Cameroon, belong to the uninitiated part of the tradition. These stories are public; they can be told by everyone and in practice they are often told to children. As has been argued before, these stories are meant to keep the order in the society by making it orderly and comprehensible for an individual, such as a child, who is not yet able to understand the world and think autonomously. Without the need to explain the real reason, it could be made clear, for instance, that one should not go to certain places. Probably the most efficient way to achieve this is by threatening: explaining that dangerous things will happen if one disobeys. In fact, this can be compared to the function of many fairy tales, as we know them in Europe or to the traditions such as Sinterklaas in the Netherlands.

When a child grows up, however, the moment comes when he or she is supposed to be old enough to understand what is really going on in the world. In the Netherlands children will eventually learn that Santa Claus does not exist and neither does the big bad wolf. In Cameroon, these moments were probably defined best in the initiations[21]. Each initiation meant substantial increase of insight about life and the world. The clue of most initiations was that you had to do exactly what had always been forbidden before, or -consequently- what you were most afraid of. In Essandja, as well as in other places in Central Province, for example, until quite recently there existed an initiation for boys during which they had to enter the sacred forest alone. This forest plays an important role in stories in which it is told that it is always forbidden and dangerous to enter. Another example is the hill of former Nguila. The forest on this hill is generally considered to be inaccessible of outsiders. If a stranger wants to go there he is seriously warned and everybody knows that he will get lost and never return. Initiated people from Nguila, however, go to this place every year in order to clean the graves of their ancestors. As everyone knows, they are never harmed.

Initiation thus seems to represent in a certain way the active thinking concept of Towa. Maybe it will not always change certain ideas per se but it will at least change the grounds of these ideas by replacing fear by insight.

The second exception on conservative thinking consists of story types that do not belong to the tradition of prescribing moral codes and the danger of not respecting them. In the first place these stories could most probably be found in initiated traditions, such as the *Mvet*, which was also supposed to be a school for reflection and discussion comparable to the classic Greek symposia (Eno Belinga, 1996). For practical reasons as well as reasons regarding the content of this dissertation, I will not further discuss these stories here.

[21] Theoretically a difference can be made between non-mystic (such as during circumcision) and mystic initiations (such as the *Mvet*).

However, also in the set of 'ordinary' stories these exceptions can be found, although in the data-set these stories were definitely a minority.

In the first place there appear to be certain story characters that play the role of the rebel, expressing a revolutionary idea or action. Let me give some examples. In Central Province there is the well-known character of Ndembobo. This character originally comes from the *Mvet* tradition but now commonly occurs in ordinary stories. In a story about Ndembobo heard in Yaounde, Ndembobo even provokes God himself (see box 6.6). Although he finally gets the worst of it, he is admired and honoured by everyone. God finally punishes Ndembobo by transforming him into a spider. Although this means he is imprisoned for the rest of his life, it should be noted that at the same time the spider is considered to be the overall symbol of wisdom: the one that sees through and remains silent.

A second rebellious character in the Far North is Kulu, the turtle. As stated in section 5.3, the turtle occurs in many stories in Central Province in which (in contrast to stories in the Far North, see for example box 5.4) it is the symbol of intelligence. But it is not mere intelligence in the sense of cleverness, like the hare's or the squirrel's. The turtle is the central character for posing questions that run counter to the conventional ideas. Kulu is able to reflect on and to consider everything in perspective, including its own intelligence, after some extensive experience. Box 6.7 till 6.9 present three examples of Kulu stories. In the first story, Kulu dares to go to a place that is feared by everyone, including the strongest animals. Finally, Kulu finds out that the perceived danger is not real and the fear is thus not justified. The story shows that if nobody thinks independently, false assumptions could persist endlessly. In the second story, Kulu ventures to doubt the power of the ancestors. This is probably one of the most sensitive issues in culture as far as tradition and fear is concerned. Also in this story, Kulu finally triumphs gloriously. In the final example, even the intelligence of Kulu is not taken as absolute. In the end Kulu is able to put his own intelligence into perspective.

In the Far North of Cameroon the person of Kulu is absent. As has been mentioned before, there the turtle occurs rarely and plays a rather negative role. Apart from this difference in character probably more important is the fact that no alternative for this 'active thinking' personage was found in stories from the Far North. Although quite questionable, it could be hypothesised that because of the long tradition of Islam, less room is given for alternative ways of thinking, although it must be immediately remarked that until today animistic influences persist as well. The belief in totems, for example, although rejected by Islam, is still common in the Far North of Cameroon. Notwithstanding this, with respect to morality and thinking, the most influential persons today are probably the strictly Islamic Marabouts and Imams.

Box 6.6: Ndembobo, challenging God
Yaoundé: Ambara Martin, age 29, male, Baveck.

Of all the friends of God, Ndembobo was his favourite. It is the name we give to the spider Migal. Ndembobo with his mouth without teeth, his round stomach, with his small feet, more ugly than the devil. Of all human creatures, only Ndembobo was given the key of paradise.
One day God wanted to organise a big party in heaven and he said to Ndembobo: "Ndembobo if you are not at my party I will punish you hard, I will punish you hard."
Ndembobo answered by saying: "Could I be there at ten, oh lord? Could I be there at eleven, oh lord, could I be there at twelve, oh lord?" Ndembobo oh, who dares to be so haughty in front of god, creator of the universe and creator of male and female, creator of day and night. Ndembobo, oh, was so haughty in front of God. That important day, all the animals went on their way to heaven. You should have seen them: oudebock, oudebock (5 times), one long line walking to the house of God. Everybody was there, everybody arrived, everybody, ai, except Ndembobo. So where was Ndembobo? And the time passed by, two o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock the time passed by. The party could not start without Ndembobo, the best friend of God, creator of the sky and the earth, creator of man and woman, creator of day and night. Without his best friend, Ndembobo, oh Lord, who is so ugly, uglier than the devil. The party could not begin without Ndembobo being there.
Everybody was in the big palace, waiting for Ndembobo. So God got up from his throne and shouted: "so what happened with Ndembobo?" A big silence came over the place, nobody dared to say anything, whatever could you say to God? So God decided to send the bee. He said to the bee: "Go to the house of Ndembobo, down there on earth and ask him what is happening." So the bee with his wings flew away, towards the direction of the house of Ndembobo. Avoum, avoum, avoum, avoum, avoum. He landed in front of the house and what did he see with his own eyes? Ndembobo lying in a hammock. His left foot on his first wife, his right foot on his second wife, a pipe between his lips, calmly smoking a peace pipe. Abous, abous, abous, breathing out the smoke to the left and to the right.
"Ndembobo", said the very nervous bee, "We are all waiting for you in heaven and you are just sitting here. One leg on one wife and the other leg on the other. And you are smoking abous abous abous. But you should know, in heaven, your best friend is getting impatient." "Mmheheh", replied Ndembobo, "My best friend is impatient. But he can always wait. He can give my friend something to drink, let him sit next to me"
So the wives of Ndembobo served the bee a gourd with palm wine, and a second one, and a third one. And oh, you know in our village. The bee, his father and grand father, all found their death in a gourd of palm wine. So the bee drunk all the wine and said to Ndembobo: "Ah, ah, Ndembobo, you are really my friend. We should not go to heaven anymore. Let's stay here and drink the palm wine."
In heaven, God waited for the bee who had gone looking for his best friend. God said to the wasp "It is your turn to go and look for Ndembobo." The wasp with his beautiful wings flew in the direction of Ndembobo. Avoum, avoum, avoum, avoum. He landed in front of the court. "Ah, bee, God from heaven has sent you to look for Ndembobo and you are lying here, drunk." "Oh what does it matter God, he can wait", said the bee. "We have chosen to drink and finish the palm wine."
The wasp wanted to leave again but Ndembobo said: "Please wasp, bring me to my best friend, to God, the creator of the universe." So, Ndembobo climbed on the back of the wasp and they went to the court of the Lord. Oh, you should have seen the attitude of Ndembobo, proud as you have never seen in life, walking in the middle of the people, his head up with all his ugliness. Ndembobo, how ugly can you be?

To be continued

Box 6.6 (continued)

The party could start now, all animals, all people, and Ndembobo himself ate and drunk. In the middle of the diner, Ndembobo interrupted the celebration. "Lord, you are my best friend but in all your creation, I've searched, I've searched high and low, and I've found the most wrongful person of your kingdom."
"Who is it", snarled God. "Oh, well I can't say his name without spoiling your evening. Accept my modest rendez-vous and we will meet in nine days on the crossing of the nine roads. "All right, I will be there." The party finished and everyone went home.
Nine days later, God went down and sat down in a bush next to the crossing. Ndembobo was there too, as well as the wasp. The wasp acted as clerk, looking to the left and to the right, as attentive as the creator himself. "Ndembobo, what are you looking at?" Some seconds later, on the first road, two blind people appeared. Ndembobo went towards them and started making jokes. "Oh, oh, two beautiful people, but they would also need more beautiful glasses." The men became very angry. "Ndembobo, how dare you make jokes about us, you know very well that we have not chosen this misery. It is God who has made us this way." Ndembobo turned towards the clerk: "I hope, wasp, that we have noted this well."
On the second road there came a man with his body maimed by leprosy. He came closer and Ndembodo started laughing, showing his teeth. "Oh look at that man who is carrying a beautiful cloth on his back, with nice spots." "Ndembobo how dare you laugh at me this way. You know very well that I have not chosen this misery, it is God who has given it to me." Ndembobo turned towards the clerk. "I hope, wasp, that we have noted this well."
On the third road there was a man who was stooped. He could hardly walk. Ndembobo started laughing and said to God: "Look at that man carrying a heavy gourd of palmwine." The man became very angry. "Ndembobo how dare you to laugh at me this way. You know very well that I have not chosen this misery, it is God who has given it to me." Ndembobo turned towards the clerk. "I hope, wasp, that we have noted this well."
On the fourth, fifth and sixth until the ninth road there came many sick and disabled people. This all happened in front of God's eyes. After a moment of silence, Ndembobo said: "Well lord, you have heard yourself that the most wrongful person in your kingdom is you. Why create people and burden them with disability and illnesses? Why create them to only kill them at the end? The most wrongful person, that are you."
God stood up very angry: "Ndembobo I will punish you, for the rest of your life. You will be caught in threads." Since that day, you can see Ndembobo in his web in your room, hanging in his web on the roof, Ndembobo in his web in the forest, Ndembobo everywhere in his web, suspended by the curse of his best friend God.

Box 6.7: Kulu daring to enter a place where nobody goes
Yaoundé: Marcien Towa, 60, male, Bafia.

The animals decided to give a big party. They had to search for bananas in the forest. The lion offered to go. He left and took a big quantity of bananas. When he wanted to return he heard a voice that said: "Watch out, don't take the bananas or you will have trouble." The lion was afraid and went running back to the village. "What is the matter, why don't you have the bananas with you? ", asked the animals. The lion explained that there was a voice that was talking. He had left behind the bananas. "Well, well", said the animals. "We don't believe your story so much. Leave it, we go." The panther now offered himself as a candidate. He went and collected a big bunch of bananas. Suddenly a voice said: "Wait." The panther said: "What now? This is the voice the lion was talking about." He was right. The panther left behind the bananas and ran back to the village. He told the story to the animals and they replied: "Oh, leave this nonsense." And so forth, all the large animals went into the forest and came running back. Finally the turtle offered for go into the forest. The animals said: "You?? How?? All the large and strong animals could not and you, little and weak, you think you can go?"
"Let me go", said the turtle. So he left and collected the bananas. When returning there was a voice: "Watch out, drop the bananas, I am the spirit of the forest." Instead of running away the turtle asked: "Who is talking, who is talking?" He looked in the direction of the voice. He saw the crab. "Have you spoken?" "No", said the crab. And to the frog. "Have you spoken?" "No", said the frog. The fish, one by one. "Have you spoken?" "No". Finally he took the worm: "Have you spoken?" "Yès", said the high voice. The turtle took the worm and put it in his pocket. He said to the worm: "You don't speak except when I tell you to do so, all right?" "All right", said the worm. The turtle went back to the village with a big bunch of bananas. All the animals were happy. Long live the turtle, long live the turtle. Now the party started. They distributed the bananas but they didn't give anything to the turtle. They distributed the meat but the turtle only got a very small piece with bones. The turtle said to the worm: "Talk, talk now." The worm said: "Watch out, here is the spirit of the forest, don't eat." All the animals ran away and the turtle stayed with a very good piece of the meat. He did not believe the others but instead did his own research. He had not told his secret to the other animals because he knew they would become jealous and that they were only going to give him a small piece of meat. So the turtle triumphed over the other animals.

Box 6.8: Kulu, doubting the power of the ancestors
Ndjolé: Jean Amare, age 30, male, Baveck.

Once upon a time, they who lived and they who have lived told me that before, when people and animals died, they changed into a man or a woman. In that village there lived a man, a man in a good position. He was rich, he lived well in that village. So what happened? He had a daughter and that daughter did not have the possibility to live with her father. Her father told her to go and live elsewhere. On the day she went away she had a child. So the woman went into the bush. She cut the wood and built her house. She built her house. Then the hare came and fell in love the woman. But she said to the hare: "You see that just at the moment you fall in love with me my daughter is giving her soul back. You have to bury her." The hare was afraid and said to the woman: "I have not come here to bury your children, I have come to love you. If you love me, you tell me, If you don't love me, you tell me. It doesn't matter." So the woman said: "Because you do not want to bury my child, then go." Now it was the turn of the panther. The woman told the same story to the panther. The panther left. Look now, all the animals came and she did the same thing. The woman did nothing else than sending them back home because only he who wanted to bury the daughter of the woman could marry the woman. So finally the turtle was there and said: "What must I do? I want to marry, I want to have that woman there." The turtle went to the house and knocked on the door: kakakaka. "Who is it?" "It is me." "Who?" "Me the turtle. I am the youngest, the most elegant, most beautiful and friendly person of the forest."
"All right, come and prove me all your sweetness." The turtle said: "That is exactly what I am here for. Really I have come to love you, I have come to tell you that I love you." So the woman asked to the turtle: "If you love me, I will ask you, my daughter is dead and her body is still on the bed. I don't have the power to bury her. Can you do it?" The turtle said: "No problem, I am not afraid for the ancestors. I am going to bury her."
So the turtle takes the shovel and the axe and starts to dig the grave. He digs and digs and digs and digs. He is tired, he takes a rest, he takes his gourd that is in his bag, he tastes a bit, then he starts digging again. He takes his pipe, he smokes, and then he starts digging again. He takes his little cola nut that always gives energy and then he starts digging again. Finally the job is finished. But there is one problem. How to transport the dead daughter to bury her? The turtle thinks and thinks. "There you go", says the turtle to the mother of the girl that was still crying. Without doubt, the mother did not know what to do. The turtle said: "Be brave, take your daughter and let's bury her." So the turtle and the woman carried the baby. The turtle buried the baby. Then they returned home. The woman said to him: "Because you have buried my daughter I will marry you." That is why being patient is such a good thing. The turtle was very patient, and the one who goes slowly goes surely because the one who is in a hurry will never get the woman. That is what happened to the other animals.

Box 6.9: Kulu, putting his intelligence in perspective
Ndjolé: Edith Youtoulo, age 20, female, Baveck.

Once upon a time the turtle thought he was the wisest of the forest. He collected all his wisdom and put it in a bag. He went on the road in order to sell his wisdom. He walked and walked and walked. Half way he found a tree trunk blocking the road. He did not know how to pass. He stayed there. The whole day he was there. In the afternoon, a porcupine arrived. "Uncle turtle, how are you doing?" "Really, I have been here the whole day, I wanted to sell my wisdom in the market. I don't know what to do. That tree trunk there is blocking my road." The porcupine said: "You are selling your wisdom but you cannot cross a tree trunk like that one. That is too much for you? You say that you cannot cross? Really you should know that if you say that you are the wisest in the forest, you are not the wisest. I am going to show you how to pass." The turtle said: "You show me how to pass a trunk, a trunk that prevents me from passing?" The porcupine said: "Follow me."
The turtle walked behind the porcupine. They walked, they walked around and around the trunk. They arrived at the road. The porcupine said: "Now, continue your road." The turtle said to the porcupine: "Really, after something like this I do not have the courage anymore to go and sell my wisdom. It is not worth it. I thought I was the wisest but there is one who is wiser than I am. So it is not worthwhile. The turtle preferred throwing away his wisdom. So all the animals came and enriched themselves with wisdom. So the turtle is not the wisest of the forest.

Finally, there is one category of stories that give room for individual thinkers and contrasting opinions: the so-called dilemma tales. These have been discussed already in section 5.3. In contrast to most ordinary stories, these stories do not end with a closed phrase, either a conclusion or a moral. Instead, they end with an open question leaving it to the audience to answer. An example of a simple dilemma tale is given in box 6.10.

Box 6.10: Simple dilemma tale
Fadare: Amadou Lawal, age 54, male, Peul.

Once a hunter went into the bush to kill an antelope. He shot his arrow but realized that the arrow was not quick enough. Instead he ran towards the antelope, killed the antelope and caught the arrow that finally arrived. He went home and put the antelope by the back door. When he entered the front door, his wife had already prepared the meal with the antelope.
Who is faster, the man or the woman?

In most cases these stories do not lead the audience to the one and only correct answer. In fact, nobody knows the final answer. A final answer is simply not the point. Dilemma tales are first and foremost told in order to provoke discussion among the audience. The course of the discussion is what counts, not the final outcome. It is the only occasion found in storytelling in which the audience is expected to actively express their ideas. Although dilemma stories are scarcely told, in all cases they were told in ordinary settings (see also

chapter 5). Moreover, when specifically asking for these stories, or evoking them by referring to previous dilemma stories, everyone appeared to know examples of this type of story, thus illustrating their frequency.

With these examples Towa confirms that active thinking is not unknown in African traditions. Compared to the ideas such as those of the negritude that emphasised the difference between 'African' and 'Western' ways of thinking, the philosophy of Towa gives a much more promising image of the possibilities for intercultural communication both within African culture and inter-culturally. Using local tools to start a dialogue based on active thinking, which means opening a debate based on argumentation and logic, could be a promising attempt to improve intercultural communication.

6.10 Conclusions

In this chapter I have analysed the potential link between the local stories of Cameroon and environmental awareness. It may be concluded that there are no direct environmental conservation messages in local stories, such as the need for protection of nature. Nevertheless, stories contain a lot of information that could be interesting for the intercultural dialogue. I will summarise this by mentioning four points.

First, stories convey concrete local knowledge and show how this knowledge is structured and categorised. This knowledge which is on an informative concrete level may have its influence on people's behaviour towards the environment. The story, for example, of the walking trees for reproduction may influence people's idea with respect to reforestation and planting trees. It is important to point out here that the concept of 'environment' is problematic. The western concept of 'environment', as well as 'nature' and 'animal', have no equivalents in local language. Instead, local stories show that other categories prevail, such as the opposition between village and wilderness. This opposition is emphasised as well by other Africanists, e.g. Zanen, 1996; Van Beek & Banga, 1992; Luning, 1991; Van den Breemer, 1984.

Second, stories can give insight into the local perception of environmental problems. As far as problems in the environment are mentioned in stories they mostly concern issues relating to the utility of the environment such as the lack of water or disappearance of game. Moreover, environmental issues and social issues appear to be highly intertwined in local stories. As a result most environmental issues are interpreted in a social way and it is problematic to extract any straightforward environmental message from the stories. Quite the contrary, many ideas presented in stories may lead to behaviour that is the opposite of what is advocated by environmental organisations. This conclusion is not exclusively applicable to Cameroon. It is in accordance with what was found, for example, by Van Londen (1994) and Oosten (1999) for the Inuit. However, whereas Oosten pleads for an acceptance of this difference without discussing further implications for behaviour towards the environment, I

would suggest that local stories could positively contribute to the intercultural environmental discourse.

Third, stories can reveal motives behind people's attitude towards the environment. There are two important concepts relating to this: care and respect (or in more extreme versions: compassion and fear). We may conclude from the analysis that the notions of care and compassion are almost absent in stories whereas the notions of respect and fear play an important role. However, there are a few exceptions in which care plays a role in stories, such as the example of the elephant baby that was cared for by a villager.

Fourth, stories can tell us about local ideas of time and change. With respect to this theme, the main conclusion is that most stories in Cameroon mainly tend to conserve, usually very explicitly and forcefully, the status quo of ideas and traditions. This attitude does not hold much promise for an environmental dialogue. One should therefore rather focus on stories that break with these customs and provide an open floor for debate. There are some stories in the local traditions, such as dilemma tales, that are designed and do in practice open up free discussion in the audience. For an intercultural dialogue on environmental protection these story forms are an obvious point of departure. As the Cameroonian philosopher Towa has shown, such forms of 'active thinking' are much needed in Africa and may build on truly African traditions.

Before further exploring the potential of these stories (chapter 9), it is important to note that in every dialogue there are of course always two (or more) parties. It would be rather short-sighted to assume that only one party, in this case the local people, deals with limiting possibilities of reflection and flexibility to start a dialogue. To obtain a more complete and balanced image, let us now consider the other party of the dialogue, *i.e.* let us in the next chapter further explore the stories that circulate in supra-local circuits.

7 Supra-local stories of nature and environment

7.1 Introduction: the stories of conservationists

In the former two chapters I have presented and analysed the storytelling tradition with respect to the environment as it exists nowadays in Cameroon. The next step is to focus on the other partner in the environmental dialogue and to analyse the supra-local visions. These visions are also partly inspired and expressed by stories. In this chapter I take a rather postmodern standpoint when using the concept of stories not only to refer to fiction but also to discourses which at first sight seem to be merely a description of the truth. As explained in section 2.3, these supra-local stories are often called environmental narratives (Roe, 1991; Fairhead & Leach, 1995). The indication 'narrative' does not necessarily imply that the information is false. Whether a story is true or false is not the main question of this chapter. Instead, it is more important to investigate how the narratives represent the supra-local perceptions of reality.

It may be useful to first make a distinction between the different kinds of knowledge that occur in the supra-local world. In the first place there is what I would call scientific knowledge, based on critical and weighted research. This knowledge is often shared among a small group of (scientific) people and does not often lead to easy and unambiguous conclusions. As a result this knowledge is not very useful for creating narratives. Popular ecology, on the other hand, is more widely shared and easier to communicate. This type of knowledge dominates the environmental NGOs and their debates. It is reflected in the language used by conservationists engaged with activism and lobby. Popular narratives include stories that we tell to our children as a means of environmental education, and stories we can encounter in the contemporary media such as the movie presented in section 1.1, or television programmes. This knowledge is not limited to the communication in the supra-local world but it is at the same time dominant in the intercultural discourse. It inspires the narratives told by environmental NGOs in international education programmes and in international political settings where important decisions are made. These narratives can thus be seen as the counterpart of the local stories in the intercultural environmental debate. Although most narratives are partly based on factual information, *e.g.* scientific data, they often include stories or ideas that are not based on incontrovertible evidence or that are held without making explicit the underlying assumptions. This makes them extremely sensitive for myth-making.

In the past years, several scientists (Ridley, 1995; Fairhead & Leach, 1996B; Verstegen, 1999; Stott, 1999; Lomborg, 2001) have expressed criticism on this process of myth making. To cite Lomborg (p.5): *" The constant repetition of the Litany and the often heard environmental exaggerations have serious consequences. It makes us scared and it makes us more likely to spend our resources and attention solving phantom problems while ignoring*

real and pressing (possibly non-environmental) issues. This is why it is important to know the real state of the world."

It is important to stress that environmental narratives are probably not the same as the perception of the experts working in the field of conservation. Although environmental experts in general may have more balanced ideas than expressed by these narratives (standing as it were between scientific knowledge and popular knowledge) these nuances are often not expressed in the common narrative language meant for the lay public. These nuances can be found back in scientific scenes and although I will come back to this in section 7.2.3, it is not part of what I would call environmental narratives.

In this chapter I aim to focus on some themes that often show up in environmental narratives. This chapter will have a more explorative character than the previous two because it was not the main focus of my research. Instead, it mainly serves to counterbalance the local stories. Many examples of environmental narratives can be retrieved in public documents of NGO's, and more particularly on the Internet. NGOs strongly depend on donors for their subsistence and these donors need to be triggered by information and marketing. Especially for marketing purposes, stories are used that express the fundamental ideas and assumptions of an organisation in a direct and simple way. Again this does not mean that environmental NGOs do not have more well-wrought documents but these are simply not made accessible for a wider audience and are therefore not categorised as narratives here. I will illustrate this chapter with examples from a number of international NGOs that are typically occupied with the conservation of nature and the environment[1] such as Greenpeace, WWF and IUCN. The latter two are also active in Cameroon. As has been rightfully remarked by several authors (e.g. Fairhead and Leach, 2002) these organisations do not operate from a universal and standard concept, and differences may occur in different political contexts. Because of my own cultural background I will mainly base my examples on the information given by the Dutch division of the international NGOs, such as Wereld Natuur Fonds (WWF-NL).

In order to analyse these stories and their underlying assumptions I will start with two basic questions:

1- How is nature or the environment perceived in supra-local stories? (7.2)
2- How is nature or the environment valued in supra-local stories? (7.3)

7.2 The character of nature and environment

7.2.1 Short historical description of the concepts of nature and environment

Before I go into detail about how nature or the environment is perceived, it may first be useful to briefly discuss the different concepts in a historical perspective. Both nature and

[1] In contrast to the previous chapter, I will use nature and environment as separate concepts here since historically the distinction is often made (see section 7.2).

environment are well known concepts in contemporary supra-local narratives. When we look at the documents presented in, for example, the Netherlands before the seventies, we can see that the concept of environment did not occur in those days. The concept of nature, on the other hand, did occur and so did the nature conservation organisations such as WWF, which was founded in 1961. Nature conservation activities even go back to the beginning of the twentieth century. For instance, the Dutch organisation for the protection of birds, 'de Vogelbescherming' was founded in 1899.

In 1962, an environmentalist text called 'Silent Spring' was published by Rachel Carson. It was mainly an appeal to get back to nature but it also included the problems of industrialisation, the use of chemicals and large-scale agriculture. Attention for these problems increased during the sixties and in the beginning of the seventies the concept of environment, as a larger part of the human surroundings including also non-biotic elements, showed up. One of the most well-known NGOs that deals with environmental problems is Greenpeace which started in 1971 with a protest against nuclear experiments in the USA.

In 1971 the Club of Rome, a group of industrialists and scientists published its report "Limits to growth". This caused a debate among mainly western countries and put the environmental problems on top of the agenda. The report was based on a study carried out by researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and stated that the limits of growth would be reached within 100 years if the human population continued to grow, and the contamination, industrialisation and depletion of natural resources did not change. In the Stockholm conference, which took place in that same year, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was founded. Subsequently, in 1987 one of the most prominent documents: the Brundtland Report ('Our Common Future') was published under the mandate of the United Nations, focussing on the issue of sustainability[2]. With this, the topic of environment had become a worldwide concern and during the Rio conference in 1992, both western and non-western countries came together to discuss the issue of sustainability.

From that time on 'environment' has probably become a more popular issue than 'nature'. Although formally speaking nature is a part of the environment (see definition in section 2.5), there are some remarkable differences between the two concepts in the language of environmental narratives. Traditionally, the term environment is strongly associated with problems, hence representing a negative picture of pollution, depletion and destruction, whereas nature refers to the beautiful and peaceful world, which we want to retrieve, or at least conserve and protect. It may be primarily for this reason that the concept of environment was initially not picked up by nature conservation organisations such as WWF that mostly use lovely images in their campaigns. Greenpeace, on the other hand, is an example of an action-oriented environmental organisation that uses negative pictures to stress the need for action, including action for nature. In the eighties 'environment' represented

[2] The definition used in the Brundtland report (1987) is: development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

what we rather wanted to avoid whereas 'nature' represented what we rather wanted to maintain.

In recent years, these two concepts have become closer. This may have been partly stimulated by the fact that people have become tired of all the doom scenarios spouted by the environmental movement. This might have changed the pessimistic idea about destruction and given room for more hopeful ideas, for which nature (what we long for) and the inspiration we get from it are very important. Thus, in a way nature in regained popularity. This is perfectly illustrated by a cartoon from the Dutchman Peter van Straaten (see figure 7.1), with the caption: *"Do not always worry about the environment, just enjoy nature."*

As a result, the insight has grown among conservationists that both concepts, nature and environment, belong together and are intertwined. Take for example the present day policies of WWF that show that attention is now paid, apart from protection of rainforest or endangered species, to climate change and the problem of waste management in developing countries. A good illustration of this intertwining is the "living planet campaign" of WWF of which the main goals are defined on its website[3]: www.panda.org/livingplanet/about.cfm

- Preserving genetic, species, and ecosystem diversity,
- Ensuring that the use of natural resources is sustainable both now and in the longer term, for the benefit of all life on earth,
- Promoting action to reduce pollution and wasteful consumption to a minimum.

Nature organisations have thus become more environmental. At the same time, environmental organisations have become more nature oriented. Greenpeace, for example, actually also includes biological items such as biodiversity in their programme. In the eighties the same organisation became very popular with their campaigns against the torture of seals for fur. This implies that the traditional distinction between the two concepts has become less prominent internationally. The question is whether it is useful to hold on to this distinction in the discussion of the narratives. As we have concluded in the former chapters, in developing countries the distinction between environment and nature is probably not very prevalent either. Apart from the fact that local people do not at all make such a distinction, most environmental NGOs in these countries now tend to work in both fields: the conservation of nature through the protection of the environment. For the discussion of supra-local narratives I will therefore not focus on the difference between both concepts, but only concentrate on nature and nature protection for the practical reason that this, rather than pollution or other environmental problems, is the subject of the dissertation.

[3] In this chapter I will often use citations from the Internet since this often gives a good impression of the actual information NGOs want to spread. All citations are from January-May 2002, and websites may have been updated now.

Figure 7.1: Image by Peter van Straaten.

7.2.2 Image of nature in environmental narratives

I this section I will give some examples of supra-local stories that reveal the character of nature. Let me start by my personal experience of the American story about the forest, the story as was told to me in the movie 'Instinct', see section 1.1. Given the commotion that the movie provoked in the cinema in Yaounde, there was apparently a strong message in it. One of the comments of the audience: "*what a strange perception of nature white men have…*", may lead us to the question: what perception did the movie actually communicate? A quick analysis of the movie results in the following provisional list:

- Nature appears to even move the heart of a criminal,
- Nature is separated from people now (and people have lost something because of this),
- People go awry when they are separated from nature,
- Nature is harmonious,
- Nature is vulnerable,
- Nature is endangered by people,
- Nature needs protection.

To summarise, we could say that it illustrates a positive and quite romantic idea of nature. Is this a common supra-local story? One could of course directly remark that the movie is an extremely fictional example of a filmmaker, who himself is probably not a competent storyteller on this subject. After all, his knowledge and interest on this subject is probably not representative for those professionally involved in environmentalism.

However, a closer look at the documentation of some environmental NGOs may reveal similar ideas. Let me give two examples from the NGO documents on the Internet:

"*Greenpeace is there where violence is done to natur*e." (www.greenpeace.org/aboutus/)

"*WWF's goal is to stop, and eventually reverse, the worsening degradation of the planet's natural environment, and build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature*." (www.panda.org/aboutwwf/)

From these and other citations we can extract two keywords that describe the character of nature in supra-local stories: nature is vulnerable and nature (or at least living with it) is related to harmony. The combination of these two concepts is beautifully illustrated in a picture from Suske and Wiske: 'De Rinoramp', which was a special edition for WWF-NL (see figure 7.2). Here we see all flagship species crying together about an awful crime committed by poachers. In the following sections the two keywords will be further worked out.

Nature and harmony

Nature is generally seen as a source of inspiration for many people in the Western world, in different sectors such as art, health and spirituality. It is linked with several concepts such as primordiality, purity, stability or equilibrium, beauty and faultlessness. In short: a state of harmony.

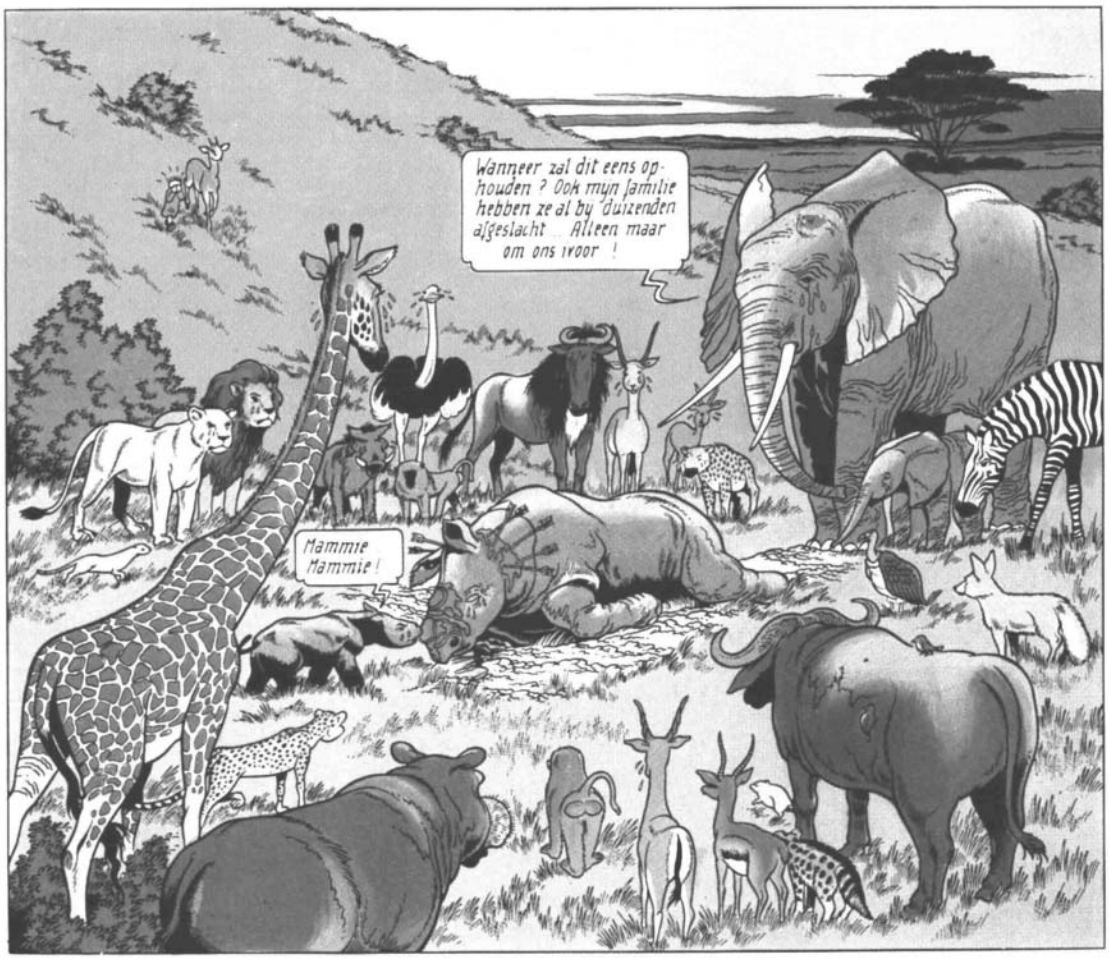


Figure 7.2: illustration from Suske and Wiske 'de Rinoramp'

This idea of harmony in nature can be found in documents placed on the websites of many environmental NGOs. 'Earth First!', for example, uses a quotation from Aldo Leopold (http://ef.enviroweb.org/primer/Deep.html):

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community, it is wrong when it tends otherwise."

The idea of harmony has also resulted in romantic descriptions of the rainforest. The NGO 'Rainforest Action Network' tells on its website that when Christopher Columbus landed in the New World in 1493, he thought that the rainforest he had found might be the Garden of Eden. According to the website (www.ran.org/info_center/about_rainforests.html) this is the first known description of a rainforest by a European:

"Its lands are high and there are many sierras *and very lofty mountains, beyond comparison with the island of Tenerife. All are most beautiful, of a thousand shapes, and all are accessible and filled with trees of a thousand kinds and tall, and they seem to touch the sky. And I am told they never lose their foliage, as I can understand, for I saw them as green and as lovely as they are in Spain in May and some of them were flowering, some bearing fruit and some in another stage, according to their nature."*

The link between nature and harmony as it is perceived today might be a reaction to the Cartesian dichotomy between nature and culture in which nature, as well as 'natural' is opposed to cultural or artificial. In this view the natural world is thus separated from the human world. At the same time, many people in the Western world today experience a physical distance to nature. As a result, nature becomes something people miss and long for. This easily leads to romantic ideas such as the idea of nature as a state of the origin, existing before people and thus undisturbed by human influences. Here the word nature touches upon another word that is often used as an equivalent in many environmental narratives: 'wilderness'.

Although in former times wilderness was often linked to danger and wickedness, in recent decades it has become an attractive concept to Western people[4]. Numerous examples of pictures of the savannahs in Africa are used in commercials, documentaries and tourist magazines. For many people in the Western world these savannahs are the supreme prototype of pure nature. However, as will be further discussed in section 7.2.3. it appears that many of these wilderness stories are not necessarily true. There are several scientific publications that doubt this idea of wilderness (e.g. Neumann, 1998; Oates, 1999).

In recent decades the idea of nature being totally separated from people does not hold, however, since it has become clear for many environmentalists (especially in developing countries) that there have always been people living in precious areas such as rainforests or mountains. Consequently, environmental NGOs have started to include local people in their projects. According to a communication officer from WWF in Cameroon (www.wwfcameroon.org/cpoprojects/seandjengi.htm):

"An important shift has been made in WWF in direct response to the 1994 Cameroonian Wildlife, Forestry and Fisheries Law which makes a substantial shift from emphasis on timber and wildlife to timber, wildlife and people".

Indigenous peoples have not only become important on the level of NGOs. They are also included in international declarations. In the draft political declaration of the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in September 2002 we can

[4] In the United States this positive image of Wilderness has arisen much earlier than in Europe (for example used by poets such as R.W. Emerson and J. Muir).

read (27): *"We reaffirm that indigenous people and local communities are important for the sustenance of biological diversity and the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems, and must participate in and benefit from the implementation of the Johannesburg Commitment."*

Indigenous people have thus obtained a place in the environmental debate but in what way? As we can see in environmental narratives, the same idea of harmony returns and is linked to indigenous peoples who, in contrast to modernised peoples, have succeeded in sharing that same harmony with nature. The document *African Biodiversity: Foundations for the future*, published in 1993 by the USAID –sponsored Biodiversity Support Programme states:

"Many traditional societies fostered belief systems as well as social norms that encouraged or even enforced limits to exploitation."

This example does not stand alone. Many environmental narratives have used and reinforced the myth of the noble savage (see also section 2.5), presenting a general picture of indigenous peoples who still know how to keep the balance in their activities in their environment. To give one more example, several chapters in the book *Voices from Africa: Local perspectives on Conservation* published in 1993 by WWF-US claim that Africans lived in harmony with wildlife before the colonial era (see Oates, 1999 p. 55).

In the end, indigenous peoples turned out to be a helpful entry for NGOs to promote their ideas of harmony. This has led to the publication of many documents like the wonderful booklet containing Chief Seattles's speech which is supposedly full of wise words of the Indian chief. In reality, this booklet was entirely written by the scenario writer Ted Perry in 1971 (Verstegen, 1999).

The link between indigenous people and nature is strengthened by a characteristic attributed to both categories in environmental narratives, *i.e.* originality. Nature equals primordiality. In that sense nature represents how it ought to be. Rainforests, for example, are widely accepted as being original and primary. Like WWF-international puts it (emphasis mine):

"*Almost half of the planet's* original *forests have disappeared and of that which remains, only eight per cent of the world's forests are protected."*

In textbooks for schools such as Tropical Rainforest (Park, 1992 in Stott, 1999) we can find the following description referring to a very long time span:

"Tropical rainforests are the most complex ecosystems on earth. Rainforests (better known to many people as jungles) have been the dominant form of vegetation in the tropics for literally millions of years and beneath their high canopy lives a diversity of species which is unrivalled anywhere else on earth."

Not surprisingly, the same idea of originality holds for indigenous peoples who are often considered to be the original habitants of an area.

Local people in their turn have successfully used the idea of noble savage in order to profit from NGOs that brought in money for nature conservation projects (Von Benda Beckmann, 1997). As has been explained in section 2.5, there are serious criticisms on considering indigenous peoples as a homogenous group and even more on presenting them as living in harmony with and being the original habitants in their environment. As Sharpe (1998) says in his article about the south-west of Cameroon (p. 37): "Social integration and coherence are a fragile and complex outcome of the work of converting the forest rather than a normal condition of life."

Practically, this policy of considering people as homogenous groups has often led to severe tensions between different ethnic groups in an area, for example with the Baka pygmies in Cameroon (Biesbrouck, 2002).

In environmental narratives, nature is not only harmony in itself; it is sometimes also responsible for the harmony in a wider context. The clearest example is probably the rainforests that are widely glorified in environmental narratives for their crucial role in stabilising the atmosphere. Although the role of the rainforest in the regulation of the greenhouse effect is often mentioned, it is scientifically far from proven and at least much more complex than presented in these narratives (see also section 7.3.2).

The idea of harmony has found its scientific foundation in the concept of ecosystem. Many landscapes in the world have been treated like ecosystems putting the focus on stability, self-sufficiency and balance, in other words like the image of Walt Disney's 'circle of life' in the movie of the Lion King. The ecosystem approach has been widely embraced by NGOs. In 1998 WWF-Netherlands and WWF-Cameroon started the so-called 'Jengi Project' in Southeast Cameroon. It is named after the forest God of the pygmies, the typical indigenous peoples of the area. The main goal of the project is, according to the WWF-Netherlands website (www.wnf.nl/wnf/website/default.cfm): *"To restore the balance of the Congo Basin with a combination of nature protection and considered use, to conserve this beautiful rainforest."*

The feeling of harmony and completeness of such an ecosystem urges people to conserve or regain the original state. This original state is beautifully presented in the metaphor of a puzzle in the commercial of WWF-NL at the end of the last century (Panda 1,1997): *"The next years we want to put the pieces of the puzzle in the right place"*; in other words: we want to complete the *original* picture. In the next section I will come back to this ecosystem approach.

To conclude, many current environmental narratives refer to nature as something harmonious, undisturbed and primordial. Undoubtedly, this beautiful representation stimulates people's desire to conserve it.

Nature and vulnerability

The second keyword in environmental narratives describing the property of nature is vulnerability[5]. After all, the whole concept of nature conservation has originated from the feeling that nature needs to be protected: if we do not protect nature it will disappear or degrade. The idea of vulnerability is implicit in the concept of degradation.

Degradation is strongly linked with the former concept of harmony in the sense that in earlier times people and the environment were in a (more) perfect state. Take for example the famous environmentalist text *Silent Spring*, written in 1962 by Carson. This text refers to a lost Eden. Carson wrote:

"There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings."

The idea of degradation is indeed very prominent in environmental narratives. Typical slogans used by environmental NGOs are:

"Every minute of every day we are losing some 26 hectares of forests (roughly the size of 37 football pitches) somewhere in the world due to threats such as illegal logging, land clearance for agriculture, road building, mining, and forest fires. This doesn't have to happen if we take action now." (brochure WWF)

The same counts for animals. With respect to rhinoceros, WWF writes:

"But whether any of these fascinating but very vulnerable mammals survive for our grandchildren to see, remains in the balance. It is up to all of us."

Degradation has been expressed in its most extreme form during the beginning of the environmental movement in which most messages were full of doom scenarios. These scenarios were soaked with Malthusian elements as can be found in documents such as Ehrlich's (1969) *The Population Bomb*, or Meadows *et al*.(1971): *Limits to Growth*. These doom scenarios corresponded with a general crisis of faith in technological processes in the mid-20th century. Nowadays, however, the point of saturation has been reached and people are getting tired of pictures of dying forests. As a result, there is a tendency for new, more positive, images to be used in environmental narratives such as the image of people planting trees.

Not surprisingly, many environmental NGOs have focussed and still focus their projects on the vulnerability principle. The Living Planet Campaign, one of the major projects of WWF, is literally based on what they call '*ten vulnerable ecosystems*' (see www.panda.org/livingplanet/).

The concept of vulnerability has a strong emotional tone. This can, of course, be seen very clearly in the movie 'Instinct' discussed in section 1.1 that is filled with romantic music and tear jerking moments, but also in the documents of NGOs we can find this same recipe.

[5] This concept is comparable to what Douglas calls: fragility (see section 2.6).

Figure 7.3: Aap, nood, mens (WWF, panda 3, 1997)

Take, for example, one of the commercial prints of WWF (see figure 7.3): '*Aap nood mens*' showing a picture that evokes above all the feeling of compassion.

The combination of vulnerability and emotion has found its outcome in the definition of 'flagship species', animals that are often used in campaigns of nature conservation such as lions, elephants and monkeys. These animals are of course characterised by the fact that they are endangered but there are more similarities. All these animals have properties that evoke care, love and compassion. The most obvious example is the logo of WWF: the panda. The big dark eyes especially are known by psychologists, who did experiments with babies, to excite feelings of care in people. The emphasis on external features is illustrated and probably also reinforced by the sale of cuddly toys. Most of these toys represent animals that may in reality be quite dangerous to people, like panthers, lions and tigers. These toys are not merely commercial; they are also sold in catalogues of environmental NGOs, indicating a total disconnection between the character of the animal as a toy and the animal that should be protected in reality.

Naturally, the flagship species are, apart from being cute, also endangered. However, the endangeredness of species is sometimes ambiguous. In some areas in Africa, for example, the number of wildlife may exceed the number preferred on the basis of the carrying capacity of the area. To give a concrete example related to the research of this book: the amount of elephants in Waza National Park in the Far North of Cameroon exceeds the maximum based on calculations for that area (Tchamba, 1996). Moreover, there are numerous animal species in the world, like insects and reptiles, that have at least the same status of endangeredness as attributed to elephants but that will never gain a place in the campaign stories of environmental NGOs. We may thus conclude that the emotional value of a species is often more determining for a place on the NGOs list than the actual status of endangeredness.

The idea of vulnerability is strongly linked with the notion of finiteness and irreversibility. Once the last panda is dead, the species will never come back again. The same counts for the degradation of land and natural resources. Although in many cases (see Stott and Sullivan, 2000) any scientific justification is lacking desertification in West Africa is generally seen as an irreversible process. It is simply not questioned whether the process is really irreversible. Once there is desert, nothing will grow anymore and this will only lead to more erosion. This idea of irreversibility is directly related to the concept of time and more specifically to the future. Indications of time can be often found in texts of environmental NGOs, for example, in the slogan: "Extinction is forever" (see also Milton, 1996) and the disappearance of nature, e.g. forest, expressed in hectares per minute.

The notion of time paves the road for another popular concept in environmentalism: sustainability. After all, sustainable development as defined in the Brundtland report directly

refers to the need of present and future generations[6]. I will come back to the concept of time, especially compared to local perceptions, in the next chapter.

7.2.3 Traditional science and the new ecology

In the former sections I have discussed the image of nature in some popular environmental narratives as they are used by environmental NGOs. Most of these narratives appear to be built on scientific insights. Let us therefore explore in this section the science that lies behind these narratives.

Environmental narratives are largely built on traditional ecological concepts such as ecosystem, carrying capacity and climax vegetation. Some of these terms have been introduced in the language of environmental campaigns building a direct link between the scientific world and society. On the one hand this fusion could be seen as a positive development in which scientists are loosing their image of working in an ivory tower. On the other hand, there are risks when using these terms in a popular way for a wider audience. The main risk is, of course, an oversimplification of the definition of these terms. As a result, a concept such as ecosystem, for example, is used in a wide range of meanings that are often quite remote from original definitions. Concepts such as climax vegetation as well as degradation, sustainability, need and vulnerability are often defined very vaguely (Fairhead and Leach, 1996b; Stott and Sullivan, 2000). The second risk, as a direct result of the first, is that of myth building.

Recently, these risks have been brought to light by several authors (Fairhead and Leach, 1995; Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997; Myers & Simon, 1990; Stott & Sullivan, 2000), who state that many of the concepts that are now used by environmental NGOs have already been seriously revised by scientists. These authors appeal to what I refer to here as 'the new ecology'.

The most striking difference between the new ecology and traditional theories is probably based in the idea that the environment is not a status quo but a dynamic process. In contrast to the ideas of new ecology, most concepts mentioned above are traditionally built on the premise that there is a stable equilibrium in nature. Climax vegetation, for example, is traditionally known as the vegetation type that appears when the ecosystem is left undisturbed by human intervention. Based on this, each climatological region has its own climax vegetation type and the places on earth were rainforests are supposed to exist have been defined. However, in new ecology the history of the natural environment becomes more and more recognised. New insights, such as palaeontologic research in the south of Cameroon (Maley, 2002), have shown that rainforest patches are not as static as they appear. On the contrary, they have been changing in the period long before there was any human influence. As we have seen in 6.4.2, local stories contradict supra-local stories as far as this

[6] See section 7.2.1. for definition of sustainability section.

theme is concerned. Local stories as collected in Central Province are not in accordance with the theory of the climax vegetation (tropical rainforest) that has been destroyed by human influence. I will come back to this in section 8.3.

The dynamics of forest and savannah have been extensively worked out by Fairhead & Leach (1996a), who have done fieldwork in West Africa for years. Through case studies in six countries they have shown that forest patches in forest/ savannah mosaic (comparable to Central Cameroon) have traditionally been perceived as last relics of a primordial forest, whereas in reality they are new forest-patches in a former savannah landscape that have been planted and maintained by people. Related to this subject is the book edited by the same authors: *The Lie of the Land*, about the truths and myths of desertification south of the Sahara.

New ecology has put the traditional concepts in a different light. The dynamics of nature makes it difficult to perceive something as original and pure. It shatters the illusion of a pristine nature, otherwise called the myth of the wilderness (see e.g. Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997). As we have seen in section 7.2.2, this myth is strongly related to the nature-culture dichotomy. Unsurprisingly, new ecology tends to revoke this dichotomy. The idea of nature as separated from people now longer holds in new ecology, and anthropogenic factors in the dynamics have become recognised. This has, of course, serious consequences for the perception of environment.

The new way of looking at the environment corresponds to the findings of several authors. The concept of wilderness, for example, has been deconstructed in the case of Kenya where the landscape that is called 'wilderness' by environmental narratives has in reality been the outcome of a dynamic process in which people played a crucial role (Pierce, 2000). According to the author, the savannahs of Kenya, as we know them today have not existed for more than a few decades. Before that time there was a cohabitation between Masai herders and wildlife (see also Neumann, 1998). Thus, the present situation known as wilderness which excludes people, has in fact been created by the management of outsiders (colonists or whatever they are called).

Probably one of the most controversial authors in the new ecology is Stott who directly refers to the second risk: the process of myth-making. According to Stott, the image of 'jungle' only exists in the heads of Westerners as a mere human construct and is thus subject to myth-making on a grand scale. Typical for this myth-making is, according to Stott, the excessive use of many so-called meta-words in its description. With meta-words the author means words which refer to highly desirable characteristics such as exotic, fertile, pure, stable, self-regulating.

It is not only through unashamed myth-making that narratives have gained popularity. In a more subtle way many stories use concepts that are constructions within a certain paradigm. Take for example the concept: 'biodiversity', that has gained much popularity in environmental debates including the Convention on Biodiversity determining the areas in the

world that need to be protected. Zerner (1996, Stott and Sullivan 2000, pp.185) states that biodiversity conservation as constructed by natural science is often justified as a redemptive act, an attempt to protect bounded zones of the non-human world described as pristine and undisturbed. Fairhead & Leach (2002) have shown that the determination of biodiversity in a certain area is highly biased by methodologies of research, and underlying presumptions that have been taken for granted.

Although new ecology gradually gains ground and may form useful counter narratives[7] it could be concluded from the recent documents of environmental NGOs (see the examples in the former sections) that conservationists still tell mostly the traditional stories.

In the next section I will discuss the second basic question of how nature or the environment is valued in supra-local stories.

7.3 The value of nature and environment

7.3.1 Different values of nature and environment

When discussing values of nature it may be useful to start from the traditional distinction between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. In an anthropocentric worldview mankind is placed as a point of reference from where values and relations are defined. In an ecocentric worldview, on the other hand, nature is placed in this position. With respect to values of nature we may define anthropocentric values as instrumental, and ecocentric values as intrinsic. In the following sections I will further explore these two sets of values.

7.3.2 Instrumental values of nature and environment

The instrumental values of nature, often called 'function of nature' (De Groot, 1992, p. 234) can be further subdivided into many different sub-values. We can distinguish:

- Carrying functions, providing space, substrate or backdrop for human activities,
- Joint production functions, referring to type of relationships in which human decisions and inputs remain dominant but in which the environment is actively involved, e.g. water and soil fertility,
- Natural production functions, referring to physical entities that nature produces largely on its own; human being are only harvesters, e.g oil and wildlife,
- Signification functions, contributing to the development of science, cultural orientation and spiritual participation,
- Habitat functions, providing the conditions for the development of non-human species and ecosystems, and for bioevolution to continue,

[7] New ecology is not the only school providing counter narratives. Feedback on traditional ideas about the degrading environment is also given by economists. Recently, many debates about the state of the environment have been held. I refer among others to Myers & Simon (1994) and Lomborg (2001).

- Processing functions, relationships in which people benefit from the capacity of the environment to undo harm or risk inherent in human actions,
- Regulation functions, referring to the capacity of components of the environment to dampen harmful influences from other components.

There appear to be many environmental narratives that talk about one or more of these values. Many of these values are well combined in the example of the rainforest as it is presented in many environmental narratives. In the first place there are several natural production functions. Apart from the fact that the rainforest provides wood and fuel, it is considered to be the home of numerous species including medicinal plants. Rainforest is known for its high biodiversity index. Because of the enormous amount of species, it is a genepool that may be important for further generations.

Rainforests also have a high protection value (processing and regulation function). One of the most outstanding characteristics of stories about the rainforest is the widely used metaphor of the 'green lungs'. Rainforests are often called the lungs of the world, responsible for the equilibrium of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. In this context, forests have recently taken an important role in the climate discussion. Forests are generally seen as an important way to reduce the greenhouse effect.

The fact that considering forests as the lungs of the world is nothing more than a narratological metaphor is recognised by several scientists. Stott (2000) even states that this metaphor is chosen awkwardly. First of all because the function of the rainforest, as presumed by these narratives, is the other way around than it is for lungs: it is supposed to provide oxygen instead of using it, whereas lungs use oxygen and produce carbon-dioxide. Second, and more importantly, because it is very doubtful whether a fully-grown forest has a net out-flux of oxygen. It is presumed by contemporary insights that these forests rather produce a net out-flux of carbon dioxide and in that sense do not play any role in the reduction of the greenhouse effect. Young forest, on the other hand, might do so. Nevertheless, the image of planted forest will not easily replace the image of the old and impressive rainforest in environmental narratives.

With respect to the signification functions, the rainforest also plays an enormous role in all kinds of spiritual activities that can be found back in movies, music and stories. As a consequence it attracts many tourists from western countries for trekking to 'find back the origin of being' (as it was stated in the Instinct movie). There has been an enormous boom in the tourist industry. In order to enrich this image of jungle, many elements have been introduced that do not originally belong to this ecosystem such as alien animal species.

As we can see from the example of the rainforest, the economic value is rather subordinate in narratives. The same counts for savannah landscapes. If we consider the texts written about savannahs in brochures, it mostly focuses on the romantic pictures of wilderness and pure nature. The same booklets subscribe the importance of some big animal

species, such as elephants and lions, by referring to their majesty and their power, rather than by talking about their economic value. A final example of how in narratives the accent is put on other values than economic ones is the already mentioned concept of wilderness. Although as we have seen in the previous section it is not based on reality, it perfectly fulfils a function because it provides a spiritual value referring to harmony and peace.

7.3.3 Intrinsic value of nature

Apart from the various instrumental values nature can have for people, there is also the concept of intrinsic value in environmental narratives. Intrinsic value could be defined by: nature having its own value and therefore its own right to live, totally independent of any human interest.

However, the term intrinsic value is quite problematic, precisely because it is supposed to be unlinked with human interest whereas it is mankind himself who has introduced the term and given meaning to it. Let me therefore explore this value a bit further in this section.

Callicott (1989) has explored the alternative metaphysics of morals in which claims of the intrinsic value of nonhuman species are embedded. He mentions four: J-Theism, Rational Holism, Conativism and Bio-empathy. The first two use an external reference point, either God or a more abstract notion of 'the Good', that makes that non-human species have a value for itself. In conativism, the concept of intrinsic value is often founded on the notion of *telos*, the will to live of all living things. Each living being should have the right to follow its will. Just as in a court of justice each party has the right to have its voice, nature also has the right to speak. Since nature cannot, of course, express itself, it has the right to have an advocate to represent its voice. A recent flyer of WWF literally states: '*give nature a voice and become a donor'* (see figure 7.4). Greenpeace states that their organisation exists because 'this fragile earth deserves a voice' (www.greenpeace.org/aboutus/). These statements are grounded in the concept of intrinsic value. However, Callicott discusses the problematic confusion between the rights of individuals and the importance of the conservation of species as a whole. After all, rights only apply to individuals or localizable things, and what is good for the individual can strongly contradict what is good for the species. Therefore, the fourth alternative, bio-empathy, is according to the author the most adequate ground for the moral intuition that non-human species have an intrinsic value and refers to the rather universal emotion of sympathy or interest in others which is increased through natural selection. Intrinsic value is the objectification of this sentiment of humanity.

The concept of intrinsic value includes some presumptions that are inherent for environmental narratives. First of all it is based on the human-nature dichotomy. The fact that nature needs its own voice, apart from human interest, implies that there might be moments when nature's interest is opposed to human interest. In that sense nature is thus a different

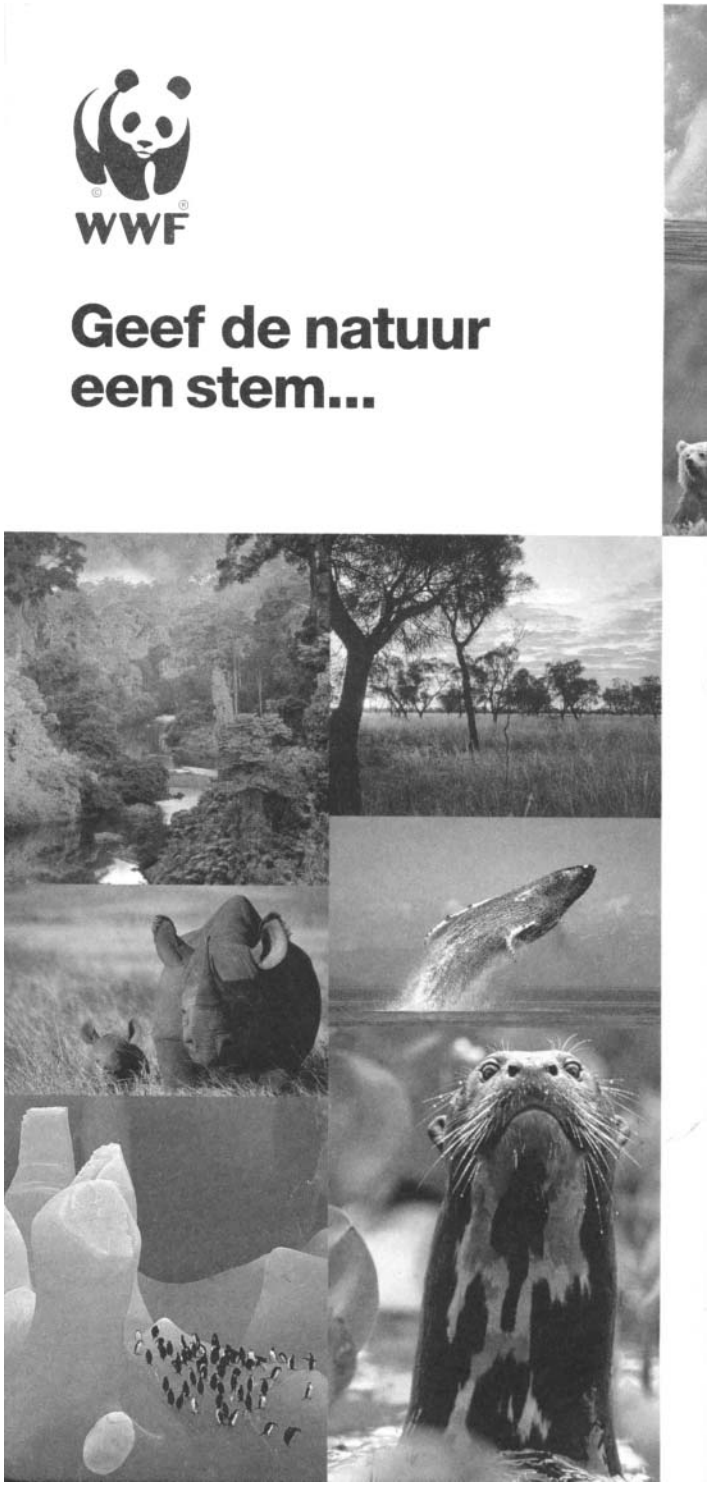


Figure 7.4: give nature a voice (WWF-flyer)

party than people in spite of the fact that a specific group of people takes the advocacy of nature. The voice of nature as a distinct party is clearly illustrated in the story of Suske and Wiske (see figure 7.2), where all animal species literally form a united group that wish to tell us something.

Nature and mankind are thus considered to be distinct parties with different interests. But there is more. In spite of being a potential opponent for mankind, there appear to be people that feel the need for defending it. This need for defending is of course directly related to the idea of vulnerability. Apparently, and in spite of the nature-culture dichotomy, some people are able (or try) to identify themselves with the position of nature. This identification is not at all something new in Western culture. After all, many people in Western Europe and the United States have grown up with pets. We give names to these pets, and we communicate with them. Much animal behaviour is interpreted by principles known as anthropomorfism[8], which means that human feelings and thoughts are attributed to the behaviour of the animal. The same counts for animals that can be visited in zoos in most Western countries. In the Netherlands children are often taken to the zoo and they talk about the behaviour of animals in a very humanlike way.

On the other hand, it should be recognised that identification with the life of an animal is very ambiguous. Compare, for example, the care for pets with the ignoble treatment of animals in the bio-industry in the same society. Apparently, the personal relationship built up with one animal could be combined with the total absence of empathy for another animal.

As discussed in section 7.2.2, there are features animals can have that give them a higher chance of being identified with. Consequently, the intrinsic value of the panda is much more recognised than the intrinsic value of a malaria mosquito for instance. This confirms the findings of Callicott that intrinsic value is based on human feelings of sympathy.

Closely linked with the capacity of identification is the development of feelings like care, and more strongly with compassion (a theme that has been discussed for local stories in section 6.7). As could be expected from the foregoing reflection, care and compassion are very prominent characteristics in environmental narratives, representing nature as mostly vulnerable. Animals especially are often presented as having anthropomorfic expressions that evoke compassion such as crying, looking sad or scared. For this purpose, young animals and babies are often chosen in campaigns such as the seals of Greenpeace and the orang-utan in the campaigns of WWF.

Interestingly, there appears to be one more ground for acknowledging the intrinsic value of nature, and which is an exception to the care-compassion tendency. I will describe this ground as ‘dignity’. With dignity I mean the value nature has acquired, irrespective of either instrumental use or the need for representing its voice for advocacy. It is probably even the

[8] This movement has been criticised by the school of behaviourism, stating that one should never presume any complexity behind the behaviour of animals if not proven experimentally.

opposite of the latter since it is based on the second concept presented in section 6.8: respect, and in more extreme cases, fear.

Many of the cases in which dignity plays a role are related to particular situations occurring in specific places. It may vary from very individual experiences to more general ones. Individual experiences are, for example, those expressed by Schama (1995), in which nature plays a crucial role in the experience of an individual and therefore receives some emotional value based on mystification and respect. In extreme cases it may be linked to fear in the sense that there are places where it is forbidden for non-initiated people to enter. Some places have become more public such as the mountains of the Himalayas which in the last decades have enforced respect by the fact that they have claimed many victims among mountaineers.

It should be remarked that the dignity of nature as mentioned here as an intrinsic value often has an instrumental side value as well. Many of the places, for example, that have proven to be respected do also form an endless source of inspiration for spiritual movements linking with the supreme feeling of divinity or endlessness (signification function).

7.4 Conclusion

Having analysed the different characteristics and values of nature in popular environmental narratives as we can find them, for example, on the internet and in NGO documents, I want to conclude this chapter with some summarising remarks.

As we have seen in the former sections, nature has an extended range of values including many direct instrumental values for mankind. Many of these values not only regard people individually but they refer to a larger scale both in space as well as in time. Interestingly, both place and time are often poorly defined. The presence of medical plants in the rainforest, for example, may play a role in the fight against possible illness in the future somewhere in the world. However, nobody knows exactly where and when. Many popular narratives are built on the so-called precautionary principle. Although the principle is very undefined, many values have been made very concrete for people to identify themselves with, for instance in the use of metaphors (for example the description of the rainforest as lungs). Apart from instrumental value nature is often perceived to have an intrinsic value as well. However, this concept appears to be rather problematic. Although this concept of intrinsic value claims to be irrespective of human interest, in practice it is often coloured by and mixed up with homocentric values, and one could ask whether 'true' intrinsic value exists at all.

Next to the values attributed to nature and the dependence of mankind from it, in environmental narratives the character of the environment is described as mainly vulnerable. 'The environment is degrading', is one of the basic messages of environmental NGOs.

Many environmental narratives are built partly on insights from scientific research. It can be concluded, however, that this symbiosis mostly stimulates conservatism since the narratives rather stuck to old theories in science than to new insights. This is not surprising;

whereas contemporary scientists admit the numerous missing links and lacunas, environmental narratives, as any narrative, need to be consistent and complete. As a result, these narratives always tend to include presumptions or hypothesis based on precaution rather than on facts.

Unsurprisingly, environmental scientists have criticised the common environmental narratives, sometimes by radically rejecting them as myths. However, it is important to state that we should be cautious not to replace one myth by another. Whereas scientific research may be very useful to make nuances and show the exceptions of different common ideas, it does not necessarily mean that part of the environmental narratives are still true.

The combination of the need and dependence on the one hand and the vulnerability on the other hand forms a perfect recipe for what I will simply call 'fear'. After all, environmental narratives tell the story of the potential danger to lose what we essentially depend on. I will explore this further in the next chapter. As we shall see there are many aspects that make the supra-local narratives very comparable to local stories. Let us therefore return to these local stories as they have been discussed in the previous two chapters, and systematically compare them with the environmental narratives.

8 Local and supra-local stories: the encounter

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will compare the two different narrative worlds as discussed in the previous chapters. I will first analyse the similarities and differences between local and supra-local stories. In order to do so, I will start from the questions stated by Milton (see section 2.6, and repeated in the next sections). In addition to these questions, I will further elaborate on the different themes that have come up in the discussion of the stories in chapters 6 and 7.

In addition to the comparison between both story universes, the next step in this research should be to focus more truly on the encounter, *i.e.* to investigate how these two story worlds relate to each other and what happens if they meet. To achieve this, attention should be paid to the imbalance of power between these stories in the world's mainstream discourse. This is linked to a wider set of ideas for which I will use the term: political ecology. In the final section of this chapter I will pay attention to what will happen to the status of different stories in the future of a globalising world, and more importantly, what effect this may have for human choices in relation to the environment.

8.2 Local and supra local stories compared

8.2.1 How is the environment perceived?

This section discusses the first three questions stated by Milton as discussed in section 2.6. These three questions deal with the way people perceive the environment, how they value it and how they perceive the power balance between mankind and nature.

With respect to the perception of the environment, Milton uses Douglas' grid-group typology (see section 2.6), which has led to the distinction of different categories of perceiving nature: capricious, robust, robust within limits and vulnerable. According to this typology, we would expect differences between environmentalists and local people, if only because of differences in grid and group between supra-locals and locals.

Looking at the environmental narratives as discussed in the former chapter, the most prominent image shows nature to be vulnerable. This corresponds to what was found by Milton (1996). Many of these environmental narratives illustrate, for example, how animals or their spokesmen are begging for help not to become endangered or, even worse, not to become extinct. On the other hand, if we look at the local stories from Cameroon, the idea of vulnerability is almost absent. Take for example the story about the paralysed bird (Box 8.1). Although this poor bird is not very capable of managing its own life as an individual, the group of birds of which it is a member is supposed to be able to solve its problem. In all the stories collected that start with themes related to problems animals encounter, these problems

are in the end solved by the animals themselves. In that sense we may speak of the image of a robust nature in local stories. But nature can also be capricious in a way that it can take revenge if people misbehave. An examples of capriciousness is the numerous amount of danage caused by elephants in the Far North. It should be remarked that in some cases, such as in the stories about *Waylourous*, it is not so much nature, but rather a direct human influence that causes danger, albeit through nature. In other cases, nature is inhabited by spiritual powers, like the spirits in the big trees in the Far North that will take revenge if people cut down these trees. This confirms that the nature-culture dichotomy, as it shows up in the terminology of the Milton questions, is not adequate for local stories.

Box 8.1: The paralyzed bird
Kalfou: Djamilo Arabo, age 20, female, Peul.

In a group of birds, called 'mange mil', one had no wings. One day all the birds collected money in order to give him some wings. They left together to visit the field of the sultan in order to eat his millet. Suddenly a servant of the sultan discovered the birds. All the birds fled but the poor bird lost his wings again. He was caught by the servant.
"Who has given you the right to eat the millet of my chief?"
The bird answered by singing very beautifully: "Servant, servant, daymana, servant of the sultan, daymana, the birds came to eat the millet, daymana, they left the poor handicapped one, daymana, they abandoned me, kourourou."
The servant was impressed by this song and went to tell the sultan that he could not kill the bird. The sultan was annoyed and sent another servant. The bird sung again: ** The sultan sent his wife and the bird sung:** He sent his child and the bird sung: **
Finally the sultan himself went to the bird and the bird sung:** The sultan finally realized that he could not kill the bird either. Instead, he captured the bird and took it home. He put the bird in a cage, and nobody was allowed near to that cage. One day the sultan went on his travels and the people came to ask the wife of the sultan to show them the bird. First she refused but finally she was convinced and opened the cage just for a minute. The bird escaped, however, and flew into a tree. There it started singing again:**
The woman put some millet on the ground and when the bird came down to eat they finally caught him again. Just in time, before the sultan returned, they put the bird back into his cage.

**= repetition of the song

It is remarkable that in local stories most of the natural powers are operative in a direct intercourse between nature and individual persons. This corresponds to Douglas (see Milton, 1996) who indicates that the perception of nature as capricious is current among groups with a low social cohesion. It might explain why the presence of such stories is higher among people who are operating more individually, such as the hunters in Central Province or the

fishermen on the Maga Lake[1]. The link between capriciousness and individuality is well illustrated in the difference between stories about individual attacks by elephants as a result of personal conflict (see story about the sub-prefect of Moutourwa, section 5.5.3.), and stories about the big invasion of animals in the event that the world should end (see box.5.11). The former is an example of a direct and concrete, everyday threat for specific people; the latter is a more abstract sign of an initiated process, which is well planned on a higher level (e.g. by God) and therefore not perceived to be capricious at all.

Related to the categorisation of nature is of course the other question posed by Milton concerning the balance of power between people and nature. In supra-local narratives, the power is definitely on the side of people. People are responsible for the destruction of the environment as well as for the protection of it. The recent Dutch commercial from the national lottery, which supports the WWF, states (see figure 8.1): *"You get a chance, they* (referring to nature) *get a chance"*, indicating that people can (and should) give nature a chance to survive.

If we look at the local stories in Cameroon, the idea that people can and should support nature is almost fully absent. Contrary to supra-local narratives, in local stories natural powers, such as large animals or strong currents in the Maga Lake, are perceived to be much stronger than people. This is in accordance with many daily experiences when local people have to fight against these natural elements. Yet there are still situations in which people are able to conquer natural forces, but in all these situations people need the help of super-natural forces, for example when using a *grisgris* against an attack by wild animals. This is particularly the case when natural forces are intertwined with human forces as in the case of witchcraft[2]. We could thus conclude that in local stories the balance of power between nature and (ordinary) people is on the side of nature.

Finally, there is Milton's question concerning the values that people attribute to nature. Nature has many values in both the local as well as the supra-local realms of narratives. In supra-local stories, these values are often mentioned explicitly. They can sometimes form the core of the story, for example in the story about the rainforest being the lungs of the world. In local stories, on the other hand, values are often expressed in a more indirect way. Moreover, in local stories in Cameroon, these values are merely anthropocentric. Does this mean that people in Cameroon deny the intrinsic value of an animal? Not necessarily. There are certainly people in Cameroon who during my interviews stated that in spite of the problems they encounter with elephants, these animals have the right to live because 'they are beautiful

[1] Although not statistically proven, most of the stories in that category were told by men performing an individual task such as hunters and fishermen. Besides their individual position they are also extrahists, depending on the environment in a very direct away in their daily lives.

[2] This indicates that the second Milton question is difficult to answer since it presumes a nature-culture dichotomy.

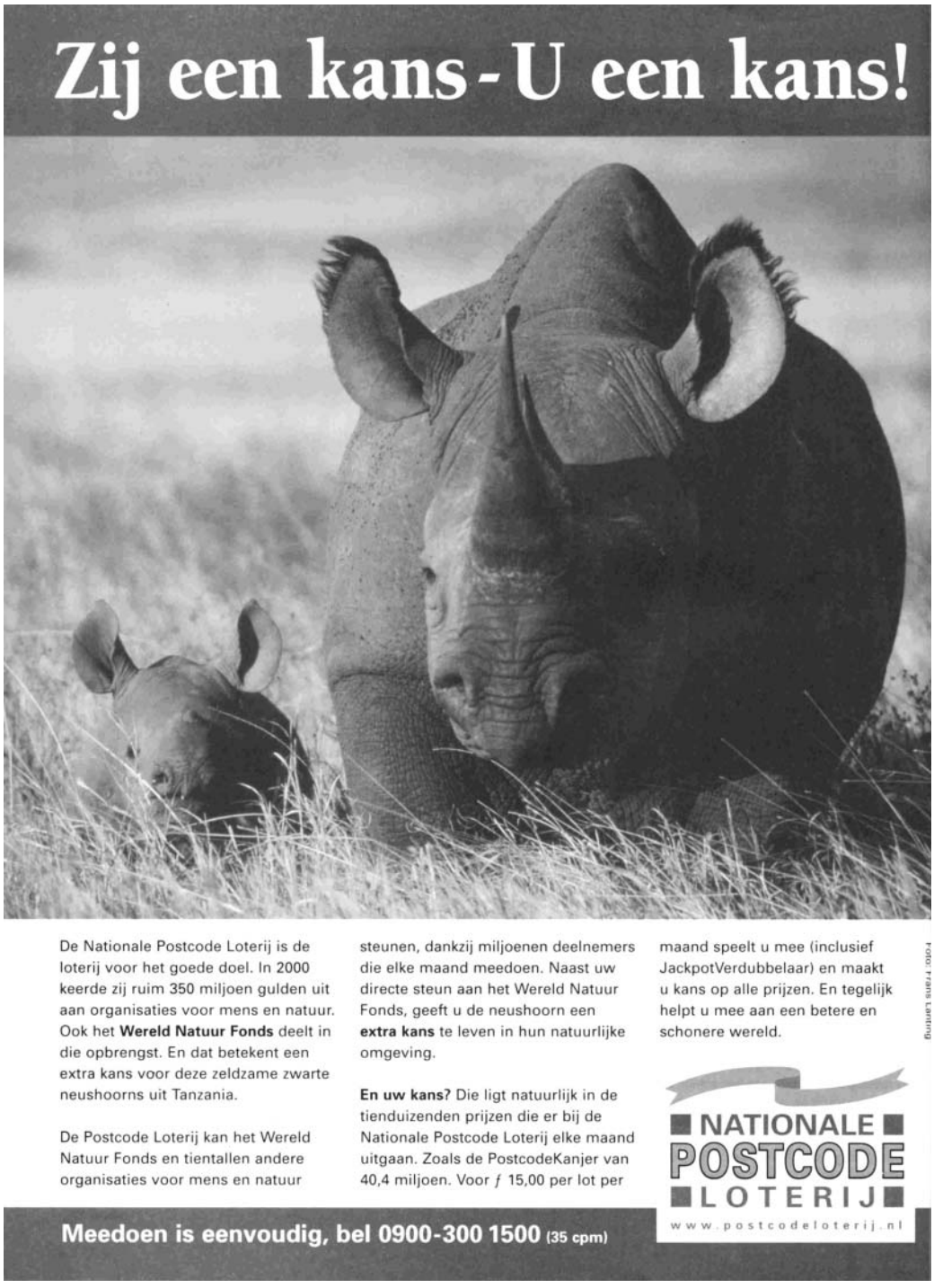


Figure 8.1: they a chance, you a chance (National Lotery)

and impressive[3]', or because 'they were created by God as well.' However, as explained in section 7.3.3, the concept of intrinsic value is expressed only if there exists a need for giving a voice to nature. This need is absent in the local vision. Even if an animal such as an elephant would be considered by locals as having its own right to exist, there is no need for a voice to defend its position, simply because it is not perceived to be vulnerable. This may explain why none of the local stories deals with intrinsic values.

Besides Milton's three questions, I have used two other concepts in the former chapters: respect and care. As we have seen, respect for nature does not necessarily imply the need for protecting it. Most elements of nature that are respected in local stories do so because they are a potential danger to people. The balance of power, which is perceived to be at the side of nature, leads to the enforcement of respect based on a tendency of fear. In supra-local narratives, on the other hand, this type of respect is absent. Instead, supra-local stories focus much more on care. One exception to this seems to be supra-local stories that refer to what I called 'dignity' in section 7.3.3. Although talking about 'dignity' can be seen as an expression of respect, this respect is rather based on the admiration of other values than strength and power. In these narratives, nature is respected because of its characteristics that are intrinsic to its vulnerability. Nature is vulnerable and at the same time it provides inspiration, peace, silence, harmony etc. Thus, dignity is still closely linked to care and love. Ultimately, care could lead to the other extreme: compassion.

The concepts of respect and care are thus strongly related to the themes discussed by Milton. To summarise this, in figure 8.2 a scheme is presented that puts the concepts of care and respect in relation to the questions formulated by Milton.

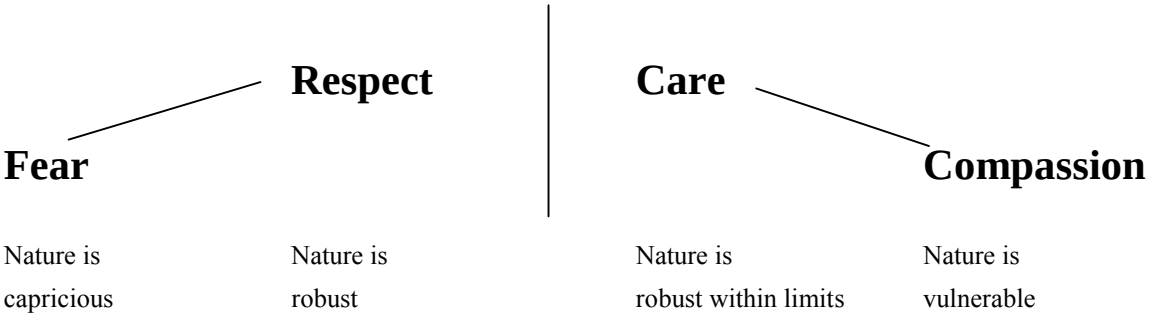


Figure 8.2: Different attitudes towards the environment

[3] Although this may also refer to an anthropocentric value, e.g. spiritual value or the potency of tourism (economic value) the statement could be interpreted as referring to be valuable in itself.

8.2.2 How is responsibility perceived?

Apart from the question of how the environment is perceived, Milton also pays attention to the potential acceptance of environmentalist principles. This is directly related to the concept of responsibility. The first question posed in section 2.6 deals with the allocation of responsibility within society.

In supra-local narratives we can find a high individual responsibility. People are addressed in a direct way: in order to change the world, you should start by yourself. Many guidelines are provided that could be realised by everyone individually, e.g. in the areas of domestic waste, transport and consumption. Supra-local narratives are often full of moralistic advice, recommending the products to buy and the styles to live.

Local stories in Cameroon are also very much marked by ethics; as we have seen, most stories end with a moral. Moral statements are directed to individual behaviour and in that way they are very tangible and concrete. However, a close look at the content of morals gives insight into differences between local and supra-local narratives. If we analyse the type of moral lessons in local stories we can draw three conclusions. Firstly, local moral lessons are very much linked to social codes, such as not stealing and respecting your parents. Secondly, if one does not obey these codes, one is punished directly and personally. Thirdly, the consequences of behaviour other than directly social is supposed to be under the responsibility of a higher level such as the village chief, the president of the country or, ultimately, God. If, for example, people perceive a problem in the environment, it is investigated as to whether there is a direct link with immoral social behaviour. In most cases a reason is found. If not, it is supposed to be outside the power of the individual to deal with it. In these cases it is only the chief or God, who knows why or what. It should be noted again that changes in the environment are considered to be revenge or punishment for immoral behaviour rather than defenceless sufferings from it. This can be clearly seen in the end-of-the-world stories. If people behave well socially, there will be no *darngal*. If people behave badly, God will end the world. As in many stories the role of the environment is here that it is going to express its power; in other words: nature is at the service of God.

Concluding this section: in local stories people's individual responsibility is to obey the moral social codes. This is actually all they can do. However, the well-being of the earth and the environment is finally directed on a level that surpasses the individual one. Degradation is perceived as an indirect consequence of human behaviour, namely a punishment to correct mankind, rather than a direct consequence of human behaviour towards the environment. Stott (2000, p. 30-31) has observed the same idea in Namibia, referring to the fact that locals see socio-political situations as a cause for a decrease in rainfall. Stott concludes that these people feel that they have no control and no power to change the environment. In that sense there is no concrete direct responsibility for people other than being a 'socially good person'.

This greatly contrasts with supra-local stories that appeal to people's direct responsibility to protect the environment.

Finally, it should be noted that discussing the issue of responsibility, one cannot pass over the so-called 'roll-off mechanism'. Environmental problems can be rolled-off in time or place. For the responsibility question the concept of time and place may thus be very important. The two concepts will be discussed in the next section.

8.2.3 The perception of time and place

The concept of time

When we look at the concept of time in stories we notice directly a distinct difference between the two narrative realms. Local stories, on the one hand, hardly ever use any indication of time. If time indications do occur in stories, they appear either vaguely indicating 'a long time ago' or 'on a day in the past' or if they are more concrete they indicate certain conditions such as the dry or the rainy season, or day and night, *i.e.* specifying some points in a cyclical pattern.

It should be mentioned that there are, of course, exceptions to this cyclical pattern such as the stories about the beginning and the end of the world, and true-life stories that deal with specific events in the past. However, also in stories about the past it is almost never specified when it exactly happened, and more importantly, they are not related to other events in the past. Take for example the formation of the hill in Zimadou, or the birds that left the hill in Mindif. These events in time do play a role since they explain certain phenomenon but they are not placed in a larger historical perspective indicating, for example, a long-term trend of physical degradation. Virtually the same counts for the future: almost no long-term stories were found about the future. Even the end-of-the-world stories seem to have mostly a very direct and short-term chain of cause and effect. To give an example, the ignorance of children leads to the movement of the moon being stopped(box 5.12), which then causes a darngal.[4] However, there were a few darngal stories found that did refer to a long-term trend. This trend refers to a purely social degradation *i.e* an ongoing loss of morality.

The perception of short-term connections implies the idea of reversibility. If people bring an offer, the process of an eclipsing moon can be revoked. Another example is with respect to the disappearance of many wildlife species in Central Province. The explanation given states that this is directly related to the decrease of powerful people in the area (see 6.6.2), and presumes that if one day powerful people would come again, this process could be easily reversed and wildlife would reappear.

In supra-local narratives, on the other hand, time often plays a prominent role. Many of the narratives as told by NGOs have a concrete time perspective in them. In these narratives,

[4] Besides being short-term it may be worthwhile to remark that the phenomenon of eclipses is repeated on an almost annual basis and in that sense time seems to be rather cyclical.

time is a very linear concept indicated by years or centuries. As a result, processes, especially physical processes, are often narrated as one-way and difficult to reverse. In these narratives, for instance, every minute a certain number of species becomes extinct and will never return. As a result, many narratives are scenarios of the future based on the extrapolation of the trend from past to present. This way, statements are made about what the world will look like in the decades to come.

The importance of time and especially the future in supra-local narratives is given form in the popular concept of sustainability. Although the term is problematic and vague, and different definitions are operative, sustainability hinges on the needs of future generations[5]. Although factually, one can never know the needs of not-yet-existing people, the concept is usually worked out on the basis of the extrapolations of contemporary needs. It forms the basis for many guidelines for behaviour. In that sense the concept has shown to be efficient as a general reference point to bring people together and stimulate policies.

In most supra-local narratives there is a strong idolisation of the past, especially in the notion that there are original and perfect scripts for how the environment is supposed to be. The concept of primordial forest or wilderness is an example based on a linear idea of time in which we are now drifting away from an ideal past. This is also expressed in the concept of environmental degradation. Although the concept of degradation is also known from local stories (see 6.6.2) there is a clear difference with respect to causality. In supra-local narratives degradation of the environment is a long-term process that is directly linked to human unsustainable behaviour whereas in local stories environmental degradation is a temporal reaction on incidental human acts, eventually meant to punish or correct socially incorrect behaviour.

The concept of place

The concept of place appears to be important in both local and supra-local stories. However, place indications are different in the two story realms. In most supra-local narratives place indications refer to processes that take place on a large scale such as desertification, deforestation and extinction of species. As a result, place indications are often very general, referring for example to the rainforests or to the global climate. This means that these stories are often very abstract and difficult to imagine for an individual.

Most of the local fiction stories in Cameroon also lack concreteness as far as place indications are concerned. These stories often contain general distinctions such as between brousse and village (as explained in section 6.5) without defining specific locations. However, non-fiction stories in Cameroon do often deal with specific places. These places are usually small-scale, talking about the village or the direct environment. Even the more

[5] See definition in section 7.2.2.

mythological stories such as those about the end of the world often apply to very local *darngals*, referring to local causes and effects.

We may thus conclude that supra-local stories have more or less the same general character as fiction stories in Cameroon as far as place indications are concerned. These stories may be fruitful for initiating a theoretical debate[6] or providing general insights. However, when talking about concrete environmental facts it may provoke misunderstandings. The difference between supra-local narratives and (in that case) non-fiction local stories can lead to very different conclusions with respect to the interpretation of a certain spatial phenomenon. Take, for example, the case of the mosaic landscape in Central Cameroon. To explain this landscape, supra-local narratives generally deal with processes on a global scale and use deforestation as a term of reference. Local stories, on the other hand, only use the direct influences of the village on the environment for their explanation without taking into account the potential link on a more global level. I will come back to this example in the next section.

What do these perceptions of time and place mean for the potential of rolling off the responsibility of environmental problems? As we have seen supra-local narratives often use long-term predictions on a large scale. This makes it easy to roll off the problem by saying that solutions will be found either in the future or elsewhere and may lead the individual into not feeling responsible. To avoid this, some stories precisely deal with this risk and put emphasis on how your individual contribution can make a difference. One example is the campaign of WWF called 'adopt a tree'. For a fixed amount every year, the narrative says, one tree in the forest will be saved[7].

The roll-off mechanism is also present in local stories in Cameroon, albeit different than in supra-local stories. In contrast to supra-local stories the lack of feeling personally responsible is not due to a rolling off in time or place, but simply due to the fact that the relation between human behaviour and the state of the environment is perceived differently than in supra-local stories. In local stories there is no perceived direct link, neither in time nor in place, between personal acts towards the environment and (global) environmental problems. Instead, environmental degradation is due to incorrect social behaviour and this would thus not motivate people to change their attitude towards the environment. It should be clear that the idea of adopting a tree for the conservation of nature (to use the previous example) would be meaningless in the logic of local stories.

[6] I will come back to these debates in chapter 9.

[7] It should be noted that these stories may in the end have a discouraging effect. Some people take this adoption literarily, leading to requests to know the exact location of the tree in order to visit it. It should be clear that the impossibility of fulfilling this request could easily discourage people to support the more general project.

8.3 The validity of different stories

In the previous sections I have analysed the different principles that stories contain. As we have seen there are some substantial differences between the two realms of stories. Presuming, as I do, that stories have an impact on people (at least to a certain extent, see 6.2), these differences may have severe consequences for people's behaviour.

If we go back to the main aim of this thesis (see basic research question): improving a dialogue, this implies that ideally, the different stories need to be exchanged in a process of mutual learning and understanding. In the remaining sections of this chapter I will further discuss the different aspects of the encounter between the two story realms.

For a mutual learning process to ensue from the exchange, both dialogue participants should view the stories of the other participant as having a certain status, *i.e*. a sufficient level of moral depth or empirical truth. The status of a story depends on many factors related to the setting and context in which the story is told. This will be further discussed in section 8.4 and 8.5. However, the status of the story also depends on the information given in the story itself. Not much learning will take place, for instance, if participants regard their own stories as expressing universal values and scientific truth, and the other's stories as based on, for example, selfishness and wishful thinking.

Such an unbalanced situation is quite imaginable in encounters of supra-local nature protection (or developing agents) and local people. With respect to their truth content, supra-local stories are easily regarded as 'science based', and local stories as 'folk', hence almost dichotomously different in this respect.

Naturally, for a fruitful and honest dialogue on environmental conservation it is important to use stories that contain information or messages that may be truer, or probably better said: more accepted, than others. Therefore the question is: do all stories have the same degree of truthfulness? Against this background it is especially worthwhile to take a better look at the validity of the supra-local stories that pretend to be the truth and how these stories are controlled by scientific theory and field facts.

An outspoken example is the case described by Ward & Weeks (1994). On the basis of a case study on oyster fishing in Texas the authors discuss how with respect to the ecology of the region different kinds of knowledge exist and how in practice some ideas persistently dominate in spite of a lack of proof. There appears to be a large difference between the scientific theories and the theories-in-use of the management agencies. In spite of the new insights with respect to the ecology of the region, management agencies keep adhering themselves to old models such as the tragedy of the commons model and population model. The authors conclude that this is done because management agencies have an interest in doing so, not because the ideas are valid but because their position as 'owner of the problem[8]' is maintained by these ideas. Although the oyster depletion is caused by many

[8] This term is borrowed from Gusfield (1981).

factors (such as pollution, freshwater inflow or dredging), in practice all focus is put on overfishing since this is the only variable that can be directly controlled by the management agency.

A second example is the well-known debate about desertification. It is only in the last decade that the truth about desertification has begun to trickle into development narratives: that desertification is not an irreversible man-made spreading of the desert but a largely reversible, partly climate driven and local process of soil degradation (e.g. Mortimore, 1998).

A final example concerns my own fieldwork region, the landscape in Central Province of Cameroon. As has been discussed before, there are two contradictory stories about the mosaic landscape. Whereas most supra-local narratives present the forest as relics of a disappearing primordial forest, local stories consider these patches as new growth of forest in a formerly savannah landscape. Which story is the right one?

In order to verify the different sort of information found in stories, it could be helpful to look for other source data. In the case of the landscape, for example, this may concern historical data. Consulting this data for Central Cameroon has led to remarkable results. An important scientist in this field is Jean Maley (2001) who has done extensive paleontological research in Central Cameroon. He has shown that, as in other areas in the transition zone, the forest has never been a stable ecosystem in the region.

Supporting the findings of Maley are the descriptions of the region of Nguila, written by a German lieutenant Curt Morgen who stayed in the area around 1889 (Von Morgen, 1971)[9]. From his field notes it becomes clear that in that period the area consisted to a large extent of savannah. In his book he writes:

Pag. 63: *"from the foot of the hill by the village of Nguila, that is characterised by forest, one enters again into a huge united savannah."*

Pag. 200: *"the savannah covers the whole plain. It changes, not suddenly, but through a transition zone…Scattered in the whole savannah we find the small tree* Anona senegalensis *that is replaced by palm trees at the side of the Sanaga River."*

The findings of Maley and the descriptions of Morgen confirm the local stories about the landscape. It is worth reconsidering the general idea of degrading forest as told in many supra-local narratives. This general idea is built on a number of assumptions that have originated from old theories that have now been gradually revised by scientists. Although already discussed in section 7.2.3, I will briefly repeat two assumptions in relation to this example.

[9] I came across his book during my stay at the home of the chief of Nguila who had an example in his possession.

The first assumption is based on conventional equilibrium interpretations of the succession theory that sees forests as later successive forms, closer to natural climax vegetation, and the presence of grasslands as evidence of degradation from a once forested state. However, as discussed in 7.2.3, new insights in science, often grouped under the term 'new ecology', emphasise the importance of the dynamics of an ecosystem being the outcome of an ongoing interaction between many factors in the ecosystem. It therefore emphasises the importance of hierarchies, and scale relationships in ecosystem analysis as well as the time scale (Leach & Mearns, 1996). One of the factors is human intervention. It therefore also questions the second myth of nature as 'wilderness', separated from human intervention. This is rooted in the traditional nature-culture dichotomy. Many studies have shown, however, that what is considered to be wild nature in reality is the outcome of an ongoing and dynamic process, in which people play a crucial role. Indeed, this interaction was also expressed by Baba Lucien from Nguila, quoted in section 6.4.2., who says that different hunting techniques have an influence on the formation of the landscape.

The case of Central Province as well as those described by Leach, illustrate the strength of narratives against empirical facts. Flying over and travelling through the province the observer sees a repeating pattern of savannah and villages in the forest. Several hypothesis are possible to explain this pattern. One is simply that people prefer to settle in the forest and have chosen the forest remnants. Another is that people actively protect or plant forest. Finally, it could also be possible that people destroy forest but only far away from their village. Although the third explanation would be most in line with traditional theories, *i.e.* that people are destroying the forest, it is the most unlikely.

Overall, the example of Central Province affirms the pattern found by Ward & Weeks (1994) that in spite of empirical evidence some myths that support supra-local intervention appear to be very difficult to eliminate. It does of course not prove that local stories are intrinsically superior to the supra-local ones. Rather, in a more Popperian sense, we have falsified the idea that supra-local stories are intrinsically more true or more connected to appropriate theories. In an ideal situation, supra-local stories as well as local stories need to be treated with the same 'critical respect' by both parties and verified in order to know the degree of truthfulness. In practice, however, this verification is almost never done, at least not by the storytellers. It should be remarked that even the staff from WWF-Cameroon were surprised when I told them about the perception of an increasing forest. As in the case of Ward & Weeks (1994) they did not have much personal research experience in the specific region and instead based their ideas on extrapolations from basic scientific knowledge.

In spite of possibilities to verify stories, in practice many myths continue to determine the present discourse, both in local as well as supra local circles. Apparently, the degree of validity is not the only reason why a story is prominent. Quite the contrary, extra-narrational elements such as setting and context appear to be crucial. As we have seen in the cases above, the interests of the storyteller, among others, may play an important role. Stories

cannot be studied without understanding the balance of power between the different storytellers. This subject will be further discussed in the next section.

8.4 Storytelling and power

8.4.1 Different sources of authority in societies

In spite of the fact that, in the local as well as the supra-local context, everybody is allowed to tell a story, it is important who tells a story. In Cameroon most stories include moral lessons that need to be respected because they were transmitted by elder people in the society. In most Cameroonian ethnic groups, hierarchy plays an important social role. Because of this we may expect that the stories of the chief of a family, the chief of a village or the religious marabou are more respected than those of women and children. A storyteller who wants his story to have an impact should either belong to this group of respected people or clearly indicate that he has got the story from them. As we have seen, many stories refer to the ancestors who have told them in former times, and these stories are not supposed to be contradicted.

Traditional patterns of power as they can be found in societies in Cameroon are absent in most supra-local organisations of conservation and development workers. Does this mean that here each story can be contradicted by another and has the same status? I presume not. Although traditional patterns of hierarchy, e.g. based on religion, have been broken, new patterns of authority have been constructed. Probably one of the most powerful sources of supra-local stories today is science.

Science has gained a lot of status in Western societies and it has largely replaced the role that the church played in the centuries before the enlightenment. In earlier days the church was the leading party prescribing how people should live. Today, many people build their opinions, codes and morals on what has been told by science or science-based stories. Consider, for example, the commercials about washing powder sustained by stories that tell that the product has been tested and that it contains substances, which are expressed in chemical formulas. Apparently the commercial pays off although it is highly doubtful whether the audience is well-versed in chemistry. Many formerly exclusively scientific terms have become widely accepted such as ecosystem, enzymes and cholesterol. Scientific statements, modified or not, are used in stories to empower them. It helps, of course, if the storyteller is a scientist himself[10]. In a way we could say that the science professor has taken over the task of the religious leader. Science has become a general point of reference in spite of the fact that, as we have seen, science is not a homogeneous world of wisdom. As a consequence, most scientific expressions are over simplified and mystified. In the environmental discourse, scientific terms have become ‘buzz-words’ (Burnham, 2000), terms

[10] For this reason in the commercial about washing powder the spokesman is a professor.

that are like markers in the wide ocean of knowledge and perceptions. These buzz-words are like magic formulas rather than sharply defined concepts, having a strong influence on the wider audience. Although pure science aims at being objective and based on facts, it is often used in a strategic way by environmental NGOs in order to strengthen their message.

Thus, local and supra-local stories have their own sources of authority. As I will explain in the next section, authority is strongly linked to respect and therefore also to the more extreme variant of respect: fear.

8.4.2 Power and fear

As we have seen in section 6.8, the concept of fear is prominent in local stories of Cameroon. One has to obey the moral codes expressed in the story in order to avoid punishment. In local stories, fear is mostly based on direct and short-term punishment. As long as the social order is maintained no problems will occur on either the social or the environmental level. With respect to the latter, the basic pattern is not that the environment may be threatened by people but rather that people may be threatened by the environment. This includes concrete threats such as wildlife destroying millet fields or killing livestock, and more invisible powers such as spirits that have their own claims and ways to achieve them. This becomes very clear in stories about places that one is not supposed to visit such as sacred forests or parts of the Maga Lake. In many cases both the concrete and the invisible threats are combined, such as in the case of wildlife that is often believed to be a shapeshifted person or spirit that lives in big trees. On the whole, local people are well aware of being subjected to daily dangers. Every year people take note of reports of people getting killed by elephants in the villages south of Waza National Park. This awareness of danger probably makes people more willing to obey certain codes that have proven to be adequate in the past. Fear is an important force that ensures that traditional codes are powerful and persistent.

In supra-local narratives, on the other hand, the idea of fear as presented in local stories is absent. This could easily be explained by the fact that most direct threats from the environment such as dangerous animals do not occur in daily life in Western countries. Quite the contrary, most of these animals are only known from pictures or the zoo. As a consequence, in supra-local stories wildlife is mostly presented as lovely and vulnerable. On the landscape level we can see the same. With respect to the jungle, for example, supra-local narratives refer above all to a romantic idea about the beauty and harmony of the place, leaving out the potential dangers. The same holds for the realm of super-natural powers that do not play a prominent role in most Western worldviews.

Yet, the concept of fear is definitely present in supra-local narratives, albeit in a completely different way. Fear arises in the combination of two messages that are clearly stated in most supra-local narratives. Firstly, nature is very important for people. It is essential for our life and the life of our children. Secondly, nature is extremely vulnerable. If we do not take care we will definitely lose it. The risk to lose what is so extremely important

causes the kind of fear that is prominent in supra-local narratives. In figure 8.3 this principle is illustrated using the example of the rainforest.

Whereas fear in local stories is based on direct and concrete dangers, fear in supra-local narratives is based on indirect and potential dangers[11]. These dangers are ever present in a typical type of supra-local narrative: the so-called doom-scenario. It has been proven, however, that many of these narratives are not based on soundly scientific evidence. They are often simplifications or exaggerations, or as Verstegen (1999) calls it: *the wrong means to achieve a goal, which in itself may be justified*. For example, there is nothing wrong with telling people that we should be careful with our energy but the stories about the greenhouse effect and the big climate changes caused by people are often based on speculation and non-truths (Verstegen, 1999).

The dangers expressed in supra-local narratives are indeed often very vague and speculative. This can be seen, for example in the so-called precautionary principle: although we do not exactly know the consequences of certain acts on the environment in the future, we count on a negative scenario and we should therefore not undertake irreversible actions. However, in many narratives it is often unclear whether these scenarios are proven to be likely or whether it is because of ignorance that we should count on the worst possibility. To give an example, I mention the expression often used that the disappearance of ecosystems means the disappearance of unknown species. These species become extinct while it is uncertain if they exist and, if so, what they are (Boersema, 2000, p. 104).

The speculative character is enforced by the fact that in most supra-local narratives, time (and especially future) plays an important role. In these stories time is perceived as a clearly linear phenomenon. However, as mentioned by many authors (e.g. Boersema, 2000), future is very unpredictable and ideas about future and the needs of future generations are highly based on present needs and experiences.

Fear also becomes clear when new technologies are discussed. Technocrats propose that new technologies are the solution to many of today's problems, including environmental problems. In that sense, the trust in technology may even stimulate an indifferent attitude with respect to environmentalism. Other people, however, see the ever-widening and deepening manipulation of nature as inherently risky and prone to catastrophic consequences. This is part of the programme of many environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace, campaigning, for instance, against genetic manipulation.

Although fear has a different ground in local and supra-local stories they may serve the same goal: they pave the road for obedience. For understanding the motivation of human acts one should always be very aware of the workings of this principle.

[11] Therefore, the second type of fear could be better called 'anxiety'. Yet I prefer the word 'fear' to put emphasis on the comparison between local and supra-local.

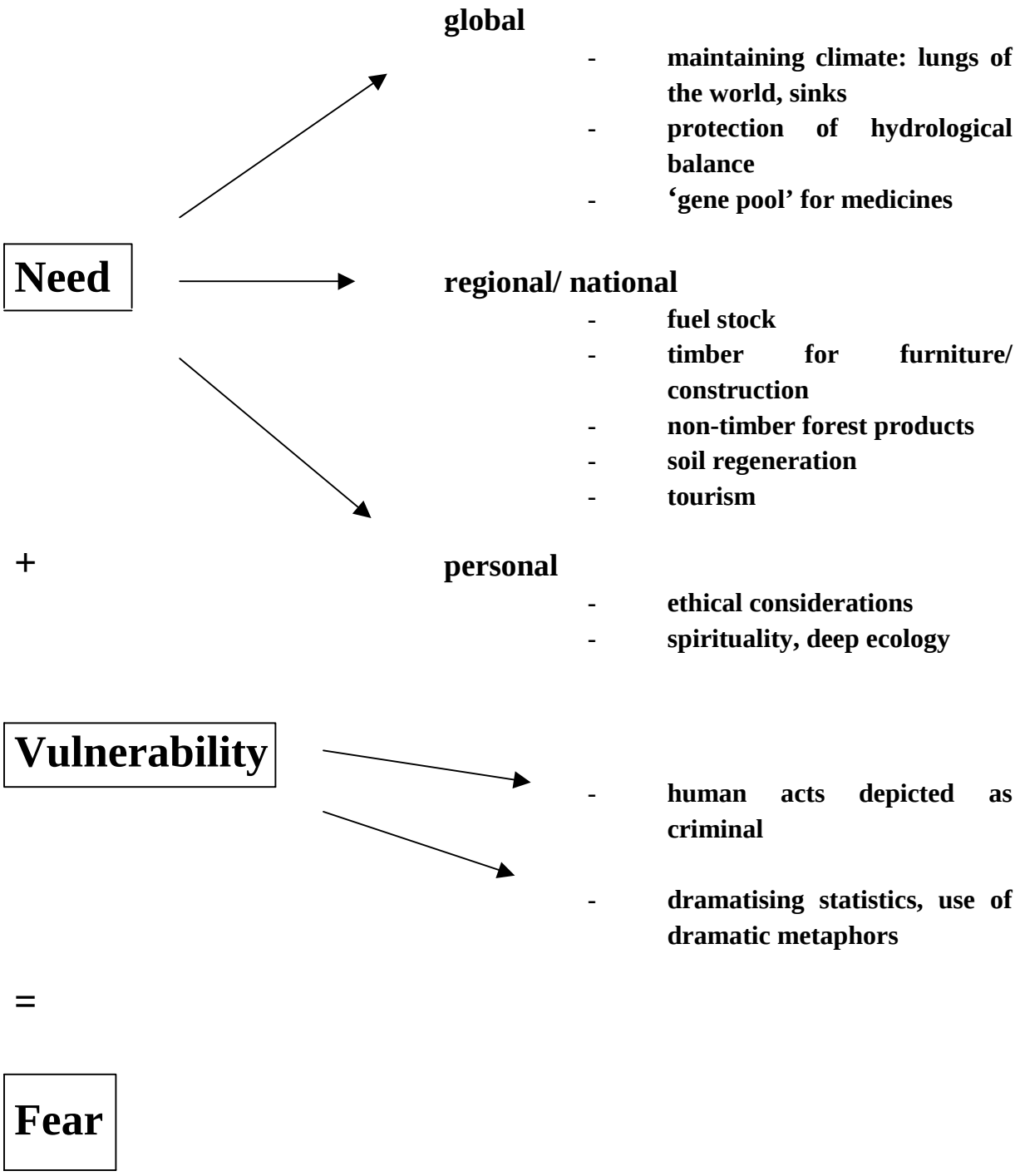


Figure 8.3: Fear arising out of need and vulnerability in supra-local narratives: the case of the rain-forest[12]

[12] The different Needs are partly borrowed from De Groot & Kamminga (1995, p.2).

8.4.3 The balance of power between local and supra-local: political ecology

As discussed in the previous sections, the impact of stories cannot be understood without considering the aspect of power or authority. Power is included in stories themselves as well as in settings, especially the relationship between storyteller and audience. Apart from the role that power plays within one storytelling universe, the question is: what is the balance of power between different story universes? In other words: what happens when local and supra-local stories meet? Which stories dominate, and why? This question is important for my research question since this is precisely what will happen in the intercultural dialogue.

It should be noticed first that all ecological projects are simultaneously political-economic projects and vice versa (Harvey, 1996). For this reason, the difference in economic and political power between developed and developing countries is reflected in the ecological debate. The study on this balance of power in the ecological debate is what I will further call here: political ecology. According to Stott and Sullivan (2000, p. 2), political ecology is:

" a concern with tracing the genealogy of narratives concerning 'the environment', with identifying power relationships supported by such narratives, and with asserting the consequences of hegemony over, and within, these narratives for economic and social development, and particularly for constraining possibilities for self-determination."

Although it has been shown in the preceding sections that both narratological universes are built on the same principles of truths and myths, political ecology recognises that in practice some stories persistently dominate over others.

The imbalance of power in the environmental discourse cannot be seen as disconnected from colonial history. After all, most of the environmental treasures of today are situated in former colonies. For this reason, many authors have described environmentalism as a movement that is not purely serving the goal of the whole of mankind. Bramwell (1994 p.208), for example, described the wave of environmentalism as "the last crusade of the Western civilisation". This may explain why some general stories that have even proven to be actually false in some specific situations, such as the already discussed myth of deforestation in Central Cameroon as well as many comparable stories about degradation or desertification, are still dominating mainstream discourse.

One of the key questions in the context of political ecology is who or what determines the conditions of truth? (see also Stott and Sullivan, 2000: p.2). In section 8.3 I have discussed differences between truths and untruths in stories, in order to be able to select relevant stories for the environmental discourse. However, the objective norms for truths are at best only applicable to a limited number of stories, namely those dealing with the informative level *i.e.* with facts that can be proven. Moreover, in practice it turns out that

even for the informative level the degree of truth is not at all determining for the status of the stories in the daily discourse.

Whereas science is grounding most of the contemporary supra-local narratives, local narratives are mostly based on religious rules. These may be partly animistic, partly based on monotheistic religions such as Islam or Christianity. Historically, in the Western world religion has been more and more replaced by science making it plausible for supra-locals to consider local stories as a more primitive understanding of the world. Indeed, there is a fundamental difference between scientific thinking and religious thinking, precisely on the point of critical verification. At first sight the authority of supra-local narratives is supported by the fact that science aims to investigate critically to achieve an objective truth whereas in local stories religion stimulates mere acceptance of traditional rules. In practice, however, this dichotomy is rather false. As we have seen, in many environmental stories verification is lacking. At the same time, Towa (1979, see 6.9) has shown that at least in former times 'active thinking' has played an important role in African societies. As a result, there are many similarities between the supra-local narratives and local stories with respect to the determination of the conditions of truth and more specifically who has the power to decide in the society. As with religion, many scientific facts in supra-local narratives are uncontrollable for people in the society. Not only because many experiments are technically too complicated but especially because of the use of concepts that are poorly defined such as sustainability, biodiversity and community. These concepts have assumed something of a totemic significance in international donor and policy discourses (Stott and Sullivan, 2000 pag 3), remaining untouchable for the society. We may thus say that the scientific elite has more or less the same position as the religious elite, represented, for example, by the marabous in the Far North Province.

Political ecology has shown that the balance of power between local and supra-local stories is not necessarily based on its rate of veracity. Instead, traditional balances of power in political and economical contexts appear to have much more determined the paradigms in the environmental discourse. Although supra-local narratives claim to be based on scientific evidence and are therefore often supposed to be very distinct from local stories, in general they follow many of the principles occurring in local storytelling. In both storytelling realms a story becomes more powerful if the storyteller is (or refers to) an authority, either scientifically or spiritually. In addition, stories are stronger when they have a high impact, mainly based on fear. Although both authority and fear play an important role in local as well as supra-local stories, these principles have different backgrounds. Table 8.1 summarises the differences with respect to authority and fear as well as some other differences that have come up in this chapter.

Principles	Local stories	Supra-local stories
Authority	Traditional, based on age and status, often selectively invoking ancestral powers	Based on scientific reputation, often invoking strategic and selective data
Fear	Direct, individual, specific	Indirect, general, abstract
Morality	Social	Environmental/ social
Scale	Local	Global
Time	Short term, often cyclic	Long term, always linear

Table 8.1: Differentiating principles in local and supra-local stories

8.5 Stories and globalisation: the conservation vacuum

Until now we have analysed the differences and similarities between the two story universes. Due to globalisation and the information revolution, story universes in general become more in contact with each other. Many contemporary organisations have started projects in which intercultural communication has become a key activity. Not only in environmentalism but also in a more general context people are confronted with many different traditions and stories, leading to new trends and cultures. This process is called creolisation (Hannerz, 1987, Appadurai 1996). In the context of this research it is important to notice, however, that local and supra-local stories do not have the same weight in this confrontation. Political ecology has shown that as a result of political and historical power balances rather than as a result of being more evident, supra-local narratives persistently dominate the world leading discourse. Due to the imbalance of power, locals are forced to deal more with supra-local ideas than the other way around. Let me therefore further analyse what happens in practice when local people in Cameroon are confronted with the stories of environmental NGOs.

The confrontation between the two story universes takes place, for example, when local people from Nguila move from their village to a big town like Yaounde. In practice this often concerns the younger generation. This generation has grown up with the traditional set of stories told by their parents and ancestors, and is gradually engulfed by stories from the West, including those of conservationists. The same counts of course for villages that are situated in areas where NGOs are operating, such as those in the Far North region, which are regularly visited by employees of these NGOs.

Theoretically, there are two possibilities when local stories meet with supra-local narratives. Either the stories conflict or they correspond. If there is conflict and local people get confronted with alien concepts or demands, this does usually not lead to very fruitful situations.

Consequently, for creating mutual understanding, a natural first step is to look for similarities in stories. In the strategy of environmental NGOs this means that one should look for elements in stories that correspond with the conservation message. Many NGOs have indeed explored this field and talk about the 'ecological wisdom' that can be found in local stories. They refer, *inter alia*, to sacred forests and totem animals. These examples apparently correspond with supra-local narratives that explain why one should not destroy certain parts of nature or kill certain animals. For this reason one might consider to maintain or even stimulating certain traditions. In some villages in the Far North, for example, people recognise the elephant as their village totem. Totemism may in this case help to save the elephant in the Far North of Cameroon.

However, apart from the question whether it is practically possible to maintain these traditions, the use of this local wisdom for environmental conservation also holds a serious risk. Although certain traditions may have led to sustainable interactions with the environment, this does not necessarily have anything to do with environmentalism as propagated by contemporary movements. It could be considered to be rather coincidental, in a sense that it has worked that way in a specific situation characterised by short term and small-scale conditions. Basically, however, the underlying motivation is not corresponding at all. Whereas environmentalists claim that elephants should be protected because of their essential right to exist and because they will otherwise become extinct in the future, local stories could tell you that if you kill an elephants you will be punished by its spirit or its relatives, that are far more powerful than individual people. This explains why in the realm of stories we may find as many positive as negative indications for nature conservation. Totemism may coincidentally and temporally agree with this goal, because in this specific case the animal species corresponds. However, in the hypothetical case that one wants to tell people to protect fish, a local story will not be very helpful. On the contrary, the story of why fish fall from the sky when it rains (see box 5.7) will only motivate people to start fishing at the onset of the rainy season. Using stories from the same tradition can thus lead to very controversial outcomes.

Taking this into consideration, what happens if locals are confronted with the effects of a globalising world? What happens, for example, with the younger generation that moves to Yaoundé? One of the most important characteristics is probably the loss of traditional hierarchy including the loss of traditionally imprinted fears. Religion is gradually replaced by science; local people will be gradually introduced to the ideas of the scientific world and they will lose their beliefs including their fear of evil powers in nature. This implies that they will in the first place lose their basic motivation of respect for nature. At the same time they have not yet internalised the underlying assumptions that are responsible for feeling the urge of protecting nature. After all, the understanding of environmentalism requires a total shift in thinking including different long-term and large-scale thinking that will not easily be realised within one generation.

A typical example of this problem are the younger people from Nguila who are working for the French logging company in the village. In an interview with one of these employees it became clear that these people are not very much concerned with the disappearance of the forest. On the one hand, being a young generation that has had much contact with outsiders, they have lost their ideas of spirits and holy places. They do not believe in the stories of the old people from the village anymore, stories which tell that big trees should not be felled arbitrarily since they may be inhabited by spirits. As a consequence they have lost the fear that in former times kept them from felling a tree. On the other hand, they have not yet accepted one of the alien underlying principles of supra-local narratives, e.g. that nature is vulnerable. When I asked villagers whether they felt that their actions would endanger the forest the general answer was clearly negative. As far as they have seen there is no need to believe this since the forest is everywhere around them, and it is only increasing. In short, there is no long term, large-scale perception of the problem.

Sharpe (1998) has discussed what happens if the two worlds meet as in the case of the South-West of Cameroon. He describes the ambivalent position of many local people. First, this ambivalence concerns their perception of the forest. This is a mix between on the one hand traditional, mythic perceptions in which the forest is a locus of potential powers and dangers, and on the other hand, a practical view in which the forest is a source of mundane resources such as timber, non-timber forest products, tools, bush meat, medicines or potential farmland. Secondly, the ambivalence concerns their relationship with timber companies (as well as with other expatriate projects whether they aim at exploitation or conservation). Although they are aware of the (historical) threat of expatriate projects engaged with forest exploitation, at the same time they also see these organisations as closely related to the development of their village or region.

The cases mentioned above are examples in which local people are poised between the two story-worlds, in what I call 'the conservation vacuum.' In this vacuum there is no sort of motivation at all for protecting nature. The traditional principles of fear have disappeared while no fundamental alternative has been internalised[13]. Correspondingly, telling people to protect nature by using the concept of totems will finally lead to such a vacuum as well. Once people lose their traditionally imprinted fear for the totem (e.g because they move to town, have less opportunities to worship it, and then realise that nothing happens) they will not have any other motivation keeping them from killing such an animal.

Thus, we may conclude that in the long term it may be counterproductive to convince people to protect nature with the help of their own stories, especially if that means with the help of traditional fears. In the end, one cannot escape from discussing the underlying principles, *i.e.* from the open confrontation of the two distinct worldviews.

[13] Very generally speaking, Europe had its conservation vaccuum too: in 1650-1850, during the transition from Romantism to the Enlightenment.

It may be worthwhile to note that the risk of the conservation vacuum also exists in the opposite situation. Confronting Western people with local stories that tell a different idea may also not be very fruitful for motivating them to protect the environment. It should be remarked that local stories have been used very opportunistically in the environmental debate. On the one hand local narratives have been extremely exploited by environmental NGOs, as an example for the utopian way of dealing with the environment (see section 2.5). On the other hand, some critics have used local stories to demystify supra-local narratives. Take again the example of the case in Central Cameroon in which local stories show that the forest is increasing instead of disappearing (see 6.5 and 8.3). In principle the attention to these alternative stories may be very helpful to break with outdated scientific insights and may stimulate the development of more sophisticated ideas in science, mentioned in section 8.6 as new ecology. However, it should not be forgotten that outside the scientific elite, these stories start to lead their own life and may easily lead to the replacement of one myth by another. With this I mean that such examples may well be used to show that there is nothing to worry about; that deforestation does not exist and neither does desertification, and the disappearance of bio-diversity. However, the fact that the forest is increasing in Central Cameroon does not mean that there is no deforestation on a more global level, neither does it mean that deforestation in this region is absent because of environmental awareness of local people. Replacing supra-local narratives by 'local wisdom' could equally lead to environmental nihilism.

To summarise, it does not seem to be very helpful to look for compromises in stories nor to force the replacement of one story by another without touching on underlying principles (such as those presented by Milton's questions and those mentioned in section 8.4) and without understanding the different perspectives from which these stories are told. Apart from the fundamental difference in assumptions, both stories should for example be placed in their own context, *i.e*. local versus global. With respect to the deforestation example, local stories may help to show the actual situation on a small scale and thus nuance simplification whereas supra-local narratives may help to uncover more general trends.

Using stories for environmentalism means that in practice one can never escape from the fact that environmentalism is a product of western Enlightenment thinking and globalisation (see also Milton, 1996). Consequently, one cannot simply use local stories as a point of reference for nature protection. If one wants local people to protect nature one should confront them with alien ideas and concepts. This could of course be done by telling them supra-local stories to convince them. One should realise, however, that an adaptation to local communication forms means at the same time that one has at one's disposal a very powerful cultural tool to manipulate people. The use of storytelling in this context becomes very much a way of what was called in the section 1.3: 'sugar coating the pill'.

Does this mean that we should conclude that storytelling is useless for a dialogue on environmentalism? It might not if we reconsider the dialogue itself. The question arises

whether environmental communication should be based on the *a priori* aim to convince people that nature should be protected. Following this scenario would indeed be a new way of colonisation and does very much touch on the ethical dilemmas mentioned in the introduction chapter. For moral and practical reasons, explained in chapter 1, this dissertation does not focus on this scenario. Instead, in the following chapter I will give suggestions for alternative ways of improving the intercultural dialogue. This comes down to the stimulation of an open discussion on underlying principles. For the exploration of this idea I will use practical experiences from the field.

9 Design and experiments of composed stories

9.1 Introduction: the real dialogue revisited

In the previous chapters I have aimed to present a general overview of the storytelling universes in Cameroon as well as in the scene of conservationists. The fundamental differences between these two realms as indicated in the previous chapter makes it virtually impossible to simply create one story that unifies both worlds. This may lead to the preliminary conclusion that storytelling is not appropriate for simply 'convincing' local people to take care of the environment, at least if one wants to avoid situations that are ethically objectionable. Since such situations are definitely not the aim of this dissertation[1], I suggest that we should look for alternative ways of using storytelling for an intercultural dialogue. I will do this by changing the aim of the dialogue. Instead of improving a dialogue in order to reach environmental conservation, as many environmental NGOs may have liked to see, I will focus on improving communication irrespective of the final outcome or conclusion of the dialogue. This means that the dialogue will not be considered primarily from the viewpoint of any party, but rather from the viewpoint of improving communication about the environment by balancing the different narratives[2].

This standpoint may be clarified by means of two terms: environmental education and environmental communication. Strictly speaking, education implies that there is one party that is educated by another and that is thus considered to be less competent or less informed with regard to a specific issue. It therefore links up more to the traditional sender/ receiver model in communication science. Environmental communication, on the other hand, implies that there is no *a priori* difference between two parties, or between the status of two stories. In figure 9.1 the major characteristics of these two types of activities are summarised.

Ideally, it means that we should completely focus on environmental communication in order to avoid any ethical discussions. In practice, however, as discussed in section 2.2, communication always includes education to a certain extent, if only in a process of mutual learning. Consequently, one can never evade this educational element. Therefore it is more fruitful to ask another question: is education always morally unacceptable?

[1] Here I refer to section 1.2.3 about ethical considerations. These are especially related to the historical imbalance of power between locals and supra-locals.

[2] This coincides with the ideas of political ecologists who see it as a challenge to make explicit commitments to enable alternative voices and narratives to be heard and to release excluded voices (Stott & Sullivan, 2001, p.5).

Environmental education	**Environmental communication**
* one-way messages	* mutual, two-way messages
* imbalance of power (teacher-pupil)	* equal parties
* active sender / passive receiver	* both parties are active senders and receivers.
* emphasis on teaching	* emphasis on mutual understanding

Figure 9.1: Differences between education and communication

Actually, there are many situations in which education is fully justified. After all, we all profit daily from what was taught by our parents, schools or friends. However, other situations may exist in which education is rather a form of indoctrination, and thus morally undesirable. In order to be able to distinguish between morally problematic and unproblematic situations, three questions are of help. The first question concerns the kind of knowledge the message contains, the second one concerns the status of the teacher, and the final one focuses on the intention of the teacher. Applying these questions to storytelling, the teacher (or sender) is represented by the narrator, and the pupil (or receiver) by the local audience. I will now discuss these questions.

1 Does the message convey values on the worldview level, textually or subtextually?
I refer here to the theoretical distinction between two levels of knowledge, as made in section 2.2. The first level, the informative level, comprises concrete knowledge; in our case, there are facts about the environment such as characteristics of animal behaviour or the medical properties of plants. As we have seen, this knowledge is often represented literally in story fragments, although these fragments are not always the leading part of the story. This kind of information is to a large extent cumulative in the sense that facts do not directly touch upon personal opinions and perceptions, and usually do not contradict each other. It should be clear that local people in particular know a lot about the local environment and its characteristics. This local knowledge, as well as outsiders' scientific knowledge may be communicated directly; it is meant to enrich the listener rather than to convince him to change his opinion or behaviour. It is true, of course, that after much cumulative information about the behaviour of a certain animal, one may start to appreciate it more or become more afraid of it, but this is an indirect consequence rather than the purpose of the message as such.

The second level of knowledge, the worldview level, is less concrete as it includes the knowledge and assumptions about the value of the environment and people's position and relationship with nature. It is often hidden as an indirect and implicit part of the story rather than a direct, outspoken message. This knowledge, as well as the interpretation of it, is largely influenced by cultural and religious factors.

It is especially the second level that needs careful attention since it is less easy to get access to, and often provokes persistent miscommunication and indoctrination. Therefore this question focuses on this level.

2 Does the storyteller have a dominant power position?

The communicator can held cultural, physical or economical power over the audience. There are many different factors that may cause a difference in power between storyteller and audience. It may be caused, among other things, by age as in the case a mother tells an educational story to her child, or by historical reasons if the storyteller belongs to a party that traditionally rules over the audience.

3 Does the storyteller have a personal or organisational interest with regard to the educational message that may be in conflict with the interests of the audience?

In other words: is it important for the narrator's own interest to convince people? An obvious example here is commercial advertising.

If one of the answers to these questions is negative, moral risks may be absent. If the answer to all three questions is positive, however, moral risks are involved. If the message only contains specific information that enriches the listener (1 is negative), the narrator can be in a dominant position. Even if the narrator has different interests than the audience, it will not influence the audience as long as it only concerns specific information. If two people having the same status (2 is negative) are having a discussion related to second level knowledge, both are morally free to really convince each other, even if it does not always lead to a win-win situation. Finally, to give an example where the answer to question 3 is negative, consider a mother who is teaching her child. She may deal with knowledge on the second level, she has a dominant position, but she has no other intention than helping the child.

In case of the environmental dialogue, the answer to the second and third question is most often positive. As has been stated before environmentalism is traditionally embedded in the historical imbalance of power between the Western world and developing countries. Moreover, if there were no conflicting interests between local people and environmentalists, if there were no winners and losers, there would not have been any need for improving a dialogue at all. This seems trivial but it should be noticed that most of the environmental narratives claim to serve a global goal and thus pretend to be, in the end, the best for all

mankind. While focussing on this global good, it is often underestimated that many environmental NGOs also have more particular and short term goals to guarantee their subsistence, such as getting publicity or creating new projects for the future.

Education could thus be justified here only in case the answer to question 1 is negative, in other words if the listener wants to extend his informative knowledge with respect to the environment. This can, of course, go both ways. Environmentalists can improve their knowledge about the lifestyle of certain animals, and local people can do the same. This knowledge is cumulative since it concerns verifiable facts.

However, the problem is that both levels of knowledge are in practice highly intertwined. The life habitat of an elephant may be well discussed on an informative level but if this elephant is believed to be a shapeshifted Mbororo, does the life habitat also include the house of this Mbororo?

In practice, most environmental communication will touch on deeper levels than only the informative level. This makes education rather problematic. Consequently, for the environmental dialogue we have to explore whether we could change the answer to one of the other two questions into a negative. For this, let us return to the initial starting point of this research: the local stories in Cameroon.

The characteristics of environmental communication, as presented in figure 9.1, include the absence of one-way messages, *i.e*. implicit moral lessons or messages. In that sense they do not at all correspond with the majority of the stories as told in local traditions in Cameroon. Indeed, these stories are meant as education rather than communication, which is totally justified since question 3 is supposed to be negative on these occasions. However, for improving environmental communication the general realm of stories seem to be inadequate.

In section 6.9 I have paid attention to some quite exceptional categories of stories that also occur in Cameroon. These stories were characterised by the fact that they stimulate the active participation of the audience and appeal to what is called ‘active thinking’. In other words those stories that turn question 2 into negative by abandoning the principles of authority. As we have seen, this is done either by introducing rebellious characters in the story itself or by using a format, the dilemma-tale that introduces a discussion in the audience in which everyone is teaching and learning at the same time.

In correspondence with Towa, I would state that probably the most important faculty of mankind is its capability of reflection. Apart from the fact that nature conservation itself can be seen as a product of active thinking, as it started in the century of the enlightenment in which people got rid of traditional authorities like the church, active thinking itself may be the property par excellence that helps people to create new ideas and solutions for problems, including environmental problems.

It could thus be presumed that active thinking is an essential step in any attempt to develop a real dialogue on environmental conservation. This will finally break with the

'western crusade' leaving space for alternative options including those that will not straightaway lead to nature conservation. Using this concept of dialogue as a point of reference, I will now explore the possibility of using these specific categories of stories for the environmental dialogue. I will do this by taking the example of performed storytelling session as a starting point for reflection, but I first want to make some preliminary remarks with respect to setting and format.

9.2 Preliminary notes about setting and format of composed stories

With respect to the proper setting of any storytelling session for environmental communication I will be rather brief. In order to avoid a forced situation, the party that takes the initiative of starting a dialogue should adapt itself to the conditions of the counterpart. Since the initiative usually comes from the environmental movement, this means in practice that NGOs should adapt themselves to the demands of the villagers. As can be concluded from section 5.2, storytelling sessions should take place in the night or at time when the villagers have no other planned activities. The storyteller should be aware of the composition of the group, as well as the location of the session. In practice this means that arrangements should be made with the chief of the village. Although this is not very different from other participatory methods, storytelling seems to need slightly more preparation time than most of these methods (see also De Wit & Van Est, 2000).

With respect to the format of the story, the same remarks could be made as for the setting: the party who takes the initiative should adapt its format to the counterpart. Looking at the total database of stories for improving an active and open dialogue, dilemma tales seem to be the most appropriate option for our case in Cameroon. There are, however, some disadvantages. First, from the data set of stories, both in the Far North as well as in Central Province, we have seen that dilemma tales formed a small minority. Moreover, the dilemma tales collected were never told by women. Finally, no dilemma tales were found that discussed serious dilemmas such as those implicit in the environmental discourse. This makes the suitability of dilemma tales only hypothetical for the moment.

Apart from the type of story (the dilemma-tale) there is more to say about the format of the story. As we have seen in section 2.4, there are many narratological issues that make a story far from neutral. In spite of their open end, dilemma stories can still be very manipulative, leading the listener to one of the options. In order to elaborate further on this let me use an example by discussing the experiment with a dilemma tale told in Cameroon by De Groot *et al.* (1995), and that was repeated by De Wit & Van Est (2000).

9.3 Case study: the dilemma tale about the two wise men

9.3.1 The story

De Groot *et al.* (1995) drafted a story and told it in three villages in the Far North of Cameroon[3]. The story begins as follows (the full text is in De Groot *et al.* 1995):

In the beginning of the earth, God created people…
And He also created the animals…
In those times, there were not many people.
People hunted animals.
But because the animals were so many, they did not mind very much.
After many years have passed that way, times began to change.
People learned how to make fields and to keep cattle.
So there was less forest…
And people also continued to hunt…
So that there were not so many animals anymore.
The animals began to worry.
And decided to call a big meeting.

The story then tells about this meeting, including the presence of the lion, the elephant and the hare. They discuss their problem and finally decide to go to the human world to talk about their problem. The turtle first listens to what people discuss about animals, and then acts as a spokesman in a conversation with the people.

The turtle began to speak... It explained to the people:
"You have a law that says that man is higher than animals.
But you also have a second law…
A law that says that God also cares about the animals.
We have become fewer and fewer…
Now we have come to you to beg.
We no longer have a place to go.
Please do not make more cropland.
Please do not hunt us anymore.
Please do not bring your cattle to our forest."

[3] It should be noted that this experiment was rather incidental and not part of a large critical debate. Although more extended experiments may have been carried out, I do not know other authors that have described the use of dilemma tales in an environmental context. For further discussion in this chapter I use this experiment as a starting point.

After these words there is a discussion between the people and the animals. Then the story ends with a dilemma:

This is the end of our story…
Now we have a question for you.
The people of the village could decide between two things.
Either they could take away the last piece of forest from the animals…
Or they could decide to leave the animals their last home…
Even if this would mean that the people would have less fields and less cattle…
And still have visits from the hyena, stealing their goats…
What do you think the people of the village should decide?

In all cases the story was told, enlivened by some details and secondary story-lines from village daily life, it was much enjoyed by the audience. Hence, no problem was encountered with respect to the entertainment value. The result of the story, *i.e.* the intensity of the discussion and its final outcome with regard to the dilemma, was highly variable, however. In one village, De Groot *et al.* reported that there was no discussion at all; people agreed with the animals' point of view and went on telling another good story of their own. This variability was also found by De Wit & Van Est (2000) who told the same story in other villages in the same region. Does this mean that people are really so different in their degree of eagerness to discuss the issue, or in their final opinions? As De Wit & Van Est (2000) remark, these differences in response do not necessarily refer to a different opinion of the people about the environment. It is more likely, in my view as well as De Groot's (pers. comm.), that the story does not provide a frame that is fully adequate to elicit free discussion and valid exchange of opinions. Let me further analyse what may have caused the ambiguities in the reactions of the local people, in order to improve the proper use of these stories.

The course of the discussion could have been influenced by two factors, apart from the real opinion of the listener. First, by elements pertaining to storytelling setting or format, and that influence the opinion of the listener. Second, by the way the dilemma is understood by the audience; in other words, by the interpretation of the content of the story. To further explain this, we may ask two basic questions. First of all, the question of whether the dilemma was presented in a neutral way without manipulating the listener. Secondly, the question of whether the dilemma was presented in an unambiguous way, *i.e.* did the (whole) audience understand the problem in the same way as meant by the storyteller? These two questions will be explored in the next two sections.

9.3.2 Lessons learned about setting and format

The variation in discussion intensity and outcome of the example story may have been related to the storytelling setting, especially the position of the storytellers. In the case where there was no discussion, the story was told by two senior male outsiders, the elite level in the eyes of the audience. The liveliest discussions were elicited, on the other extreme, by De Wit & Van Est, two younger female storytellers, the latter of whom had stayed in the village for a long time.

Related to the storyteller factor is the impact of the interpreter. In Cameroon, as in many other situations, the storytellers needed an interpreter to translate the text from French into the local language. This translation could of course have biased both the format and the content of the story. To reduce this bias, De Groot *et al.* had chosen to tell the story in a line-by-line translation. Although this may have reduced the bias in content, *i.e.* increased the reliability of the literal translation, this may have seriously limited the storyteller in his freedom to depict the story characters and to involve the audience in the story, which in its turn may have determined what the audience finally retains.

The "storyteller factor" can never be fully avoided in any storytelling communication project. Hence, the form of the story should be designed such that the story's outcome will be less dependent on whoever tells it. If we take a look at the example story, we note that (1) it is highly structured and (2) it is clear to the audience that the storyteller is in fact "part of the story". The local people, obviously, are represented by the villagers in the story; the storyteller, almost necessarily, deemed to be associated with the animals. Due to this, the storyteller lends his/her authority to the animals' case, and disagreeing with the animals will be felt by the audience as offending the storyteller. To avoid this, the storyteller should complicate the story such that his/her position becomes less structured, and involve in the story at least one third party that may act as a judge between the position of the storyteller and the local people.

In addition to this, it is of importance how the story itself was told. The impact of a story, *i.e.* whether people like it and whether people get the message properly, is highly determined by the storyteller. This is in the first place of course influenced by the degree of attention of the auditors, *i.e.* to what extent people are interested to listen to the story and remember it. As we have seen in chapter 5 the most important function of stories is not education but rather entertainment. Consequently, a story needs to be told in an as lively way as possible and should particularly include humour. It should be clear that, apart from the talents of the storyteller, a line-by-line translation seriously limits the storyteller in achieving this.

Apart from the extent of interest the story has on a whole, there are more specific factors that determine how the story is finally understood. Based on the insights from narratology discussed in section 2.4, I will discuss three narrative techniques that a storyteller may use to

predetermine the final interpretation of the story: focalisation, story ending, and story characters.

In the first place, the focalisation of the story may have an important influence on the value attributed by the audience to certain events in the story. As we have seen from the case of the Kikuyu stories (Brinkman, 1996)[4], for example, the room that is given to each character in the story may determine the attitude the listener finally has with respect to the characters after listening to the story. Similarly, the discussion in the case of De Groot *et al.* (1995) can be highly influenced by the room that is given to either mankind or the animals to speak and explain their point in the story.

Related to this focalisation on different characters is the casting of the characters in the story. As we have seen in chapter 5, in most actual stories in Cameroon there are different animal characters that all have a fixed status known by the audience. The most striking characters are undoubtedly the hero and the anti-hero, but there are many more (see table 5.2 and see also Schipper, 1990b). Choosing the characters that defend the environmental or non-environmental points of view may have consequences for the outcomes. Intuitively, De Groot *et al.* (1995) had chosen the turtle to be the advocate of the animals' case in order to avoid outspoken characters of nature protection such as the lion and the elephant. Unknown to them, the turtle is a wise and rebellious character in many stories of Central Cameroon but an unreliable character in Far North Cameroon. The choice may thus have been good for the Central Province as it refers to active thinking, but did not work the same for the experiment in the Far North. The general conclusion is that a good knowledge of local story characters is necessary before choosing specific ones. Using neutral human characters (like 'John' and 'Pete') seems a rather dull but safe alternative if such knowledge is lacking.

Finally, I want to refer to theories in narratology about story endings. In contrast to moralistic stories with a closed end, in dilemma tales the end is left open. However, if the dilemma is preceded in the story by a concluding moral discourse, like in the story of De Groot *et al.* (1995), it is not neutral at all. The story of De Groot *et al.* contains only one plea, namely that of the animals. Very little voice was given to the people. A well-balanced dilemma should contain at least two pleas, making it possible to defend each party in the debate.

It should be realised, as stated in section 2.4, that the manipulative character of stories is not new. Local people use it themselves every day, for example when educating their children. In fact each story is manipulative because the way it is told influences to a certain extent the discussion. However, in contrast to most other stories, in dilemma tales this may have a clear advantage because they are made to evoke discussion. A good and neutral storyteller can lead the discussion about the dilemma in such a way that people get maximally involved and

[4] See section 2.4. Here it concerns the gender related focalisation.

stimulated to express their own opinions. This means that when the discussion is going in a certain direction, the storyteller can advocate the opposite meaning and in this way he/she can always bring the discussion back to a central point or enter into discussion that local people find central even if unintended by the storyteller. Doing so, the storyteller is merely a catalyst. Thus even if the discussion does not agree with his opinion the neutral storyteller should not intervene as a discussant. This way, the discussion also gives feedback to the narrator, showing him/her the impact of the story as well as giving him information about how people interpret certain issues, meanings etc. All the while, of course, the storyteller is not neutral in the sense that he has been the one who has determined the subject of the discussion. About the determination of the exact subject, *i.e.* the content of the story more will be said in the next section.

9.3.3 Lessons learned about the content: postulating the right dilemma

Being totally aware of how to tell a story is still not a guarantee for successful communication. Also the content of the story requires scrutiny. Let us therefore come to the second question of whether the presented dilemma is clear for all parties and does not lead, for instance, to unintended discussions.

As concluded in the previous section, one should be careful with the choice of story characters. Apart from the manipulative aspects, it should be remarked that the literal use of animals as a party (opposed to humans) might cause misunderstandings since animals are often seen as representations of human characters. Relating the conflict between humans and animals may be interpreted as a conflict between different human characters only. In this sense it is no longer an environmental dilemma but has rather become a social dilemma.

Probably even more important here is whether the final question posed by De Groot *et al.* (1995) to either protect or destroy the environment is too ambiguous. After all, nature protection in its present form is the final outcome of a long tradition. Consequently, there are many underlying premises that may determine the opinion of the listener about this question. If, in the case of the example story, people would choose the side of the animals, one cannot know whether this is based on, for instance, the insight in the need for protection, or the fear that animals will take revenge one day. Even the aim to protect an animal may be based on different motives, depending, for example, on the cultural or spiritual value of the animal in the society. In this sense the dilemma of De Groot *et al.* (1995) does not help to get insight in the underlying assumptions and worldviews. If we really want to understand what local people think, and stimulate discussion on this, we need to formulate the dilemma in such a way that it will elicit these underlying assumptions. For this we could be inspired, for example, by the questions posed by Milton (1996, see section 2.6).

Although the story of De Groot *et al.* aims to deal with the third question posed in section 2.6 (De Groot, pers. comm.) this is not covered by the final dilemma question in the tale. Although emphasis is put in the story on the non-instrumental value of nature, protecting

nature may still be based on both anthropocentric and eco-centric reasons. Moreover, the answers to the other questions are prematurely fixed in the example story: man is higher than animals, and the environment is vulnerable (the animals are gradually disappearing). By using the creation of God, the story describes a long historical and linear time frame. Moreover, an appeal is made to people's personal responsibility.

To improve communication one should tell stories that deal with questions like those posed by Milton instead of keeping the dialogue on a general level that often includes concepts of high complexity such as the dilemma of whether animals should be protected or not. Only when dealing with these basic underlying questions can one come to a mutual understanding of assumptions that together may finally build such a complex idea as environmental protection. In an ideal situation, each story should deal with only one question in order to be able to interpret the outcome of the discussion unambiguously. While dealing with a particular question one should try to leave the answers to the other questions as open as possible. Fixing the other questions can easily lead to constrained discussions and even to protest among the audience. On the other hand, leaving the answers open may risk the discussion deviating to other issues. However, as long as these issues are related to relevant themes this may only give additional information. If irrelevant issues are touched upon, the debate should be refocussed by the facilitator.

Finally, it should be remarked that in spite of taking into account what is discussed above, one should always be aware that messages may be interpreted wrongly because, for example, the way in which a story is told does not correspond to the intended message. In practice, of course, one can never be sure whether a message is interpreted the way it was meant. To minimise the risk, the storyteller can always verify things by asking questions of the audience. This is an important difference between written and oral texts (Finnegan, 1988; Epskamp, 1995), as well as between pre-prepared one way messages used in mass media (used by many entertainment-education projects) and two-sided communication in small storytelling settings.

To summarise this section, a new dilemma story should be composed using the scheme as presented in figure 9.2.

Based on what has been discussed in this section one could be able to create new stories. In the next section I will return to the experiments I have done in the two research areas with three example stories, as well as some additional experiments. It may be helpful to first give a short summary of the key themes that represent the local vision for supra-locals (box 9.1) as well as the supra-local vision for locals (box 9.2), based on the findings in the previous chapters.

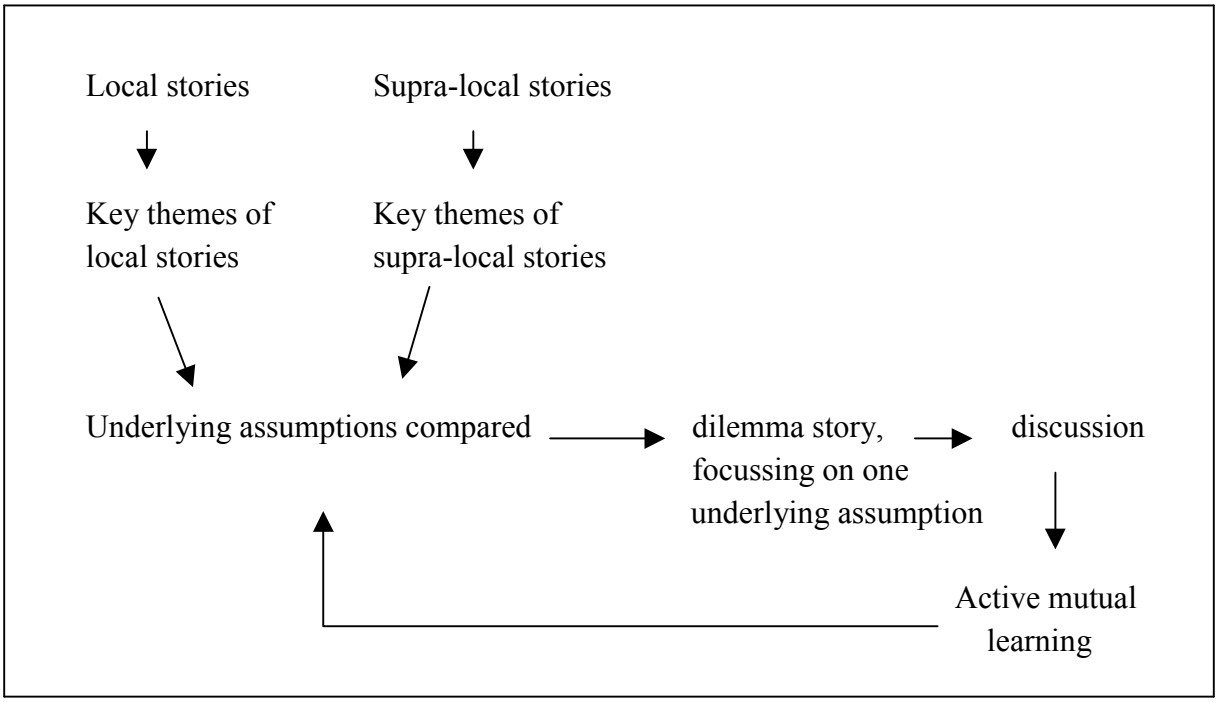


Figure 9.2: the process of composition of a dilemma story

Box 9.1: Local vision for supra locals

How is nature perceived?

Nature is not separated from human beings but there is an ongoing dynamic inter-relationship between people and the environment. Moreover, nature is resilient, the balance of power lies at the side of nature. The vulnerability as presumed by supra-locals is not always evident. The landscape is not always necessarily degrading, as we have seen from the example of Central Cameroon. In many situations, nature is very well capable of recovering by itself, just like people do. In fact, nature or the powers within nature, are able to think and act according to human logic. If, for instance, animals are endangered in a certain place they are not doomed to wait for their end, they simply move elsewhere.

Nature is often valued anthropocentrically, all values in nature are with reference to human standards. In some stories, however, animals are presented as parts of the creation of God and in that sense may have a value of their own.

How is responsibility allocated within a society?

Responsibility is not taken individually but mostly taken by local authorities, white people or even God. With respect to time, there is definitely a relationship between time and events, including environmental changes in stories but this relationship is indirect, in the sense that degradation can be a way of punishment or revenge for human immoral behaviour. In this sense people do not cause degradation by direct action. Degradation is rather a means to correct humans. The same question could be explored for the relationship between events and place. Most stories deal with very local situations. Consequently, environmental degradation, if perceived, is short term and on a small-scale leading to direct visible effects.

Box 9.2: Supra-local vision for locals

How is nature perceived?

Probably the most important message is that nature is not always as resilient as it looks. Instead, it is vulnerable and therefore needs protection. It even needs more protection since it is extremely valuable both anthropocentrically as well as eco-centrically. Furthermore, the balance of power is on the side of people. People are able to determine part of the environmental state as it is a direct outcome of their activities. There is no power behind nature, either divine or spiritual, to punish mankind, nor correct him in order to avoid real disasters.

How is responsibility allocated within society?

The relation between time and event is understood in a direct way, although it may be long-term and large-scale. Responsibility cannot be put on others very easily as can been seen from messages such as "A better environment starts with yourself."

This message also states that preoccupation about the environment has not come out of the blue. It is the result of bitter experience in developed countries as a result of certain behaviour. Although it is morally incorrect to claim authority over natural resources in foreign countries, overall precaution is needed to avoid repetition of certain disasters that effect the world as a whole.

9.4 Composing the stories for experimentation

9.4.1 The construction of new stories: an experiment

The composition of new stories was a process that was for a large part inspired by existing local stories. As a first step in this process I used a technique to start a dialogue and create a new story: a group of storytellers was formed (minimum two, including myself). Each storyteller in turn was allowed to say one sentence as part of the story under construction. The sentence needed to be a logical follow-up to the previous lines. A limited time, for example five minutes was determined, to complete the story. The story was taped, played off and discussed later by the group.

This technique has the important advantage that it is not morally questionable. As long as one stays within the logic of the story under construction all storytellers have the same position being storyteller and audience at the same time. Each storyteller is very limited with respect to his/her influence on the course of the story. This influence decreases as the number of participants increases. Since there is not one storyteller and his audience there is no

difference in status between the two parties. Consequently, the answer to question 2, discussed in section 9.1 is negative, and each storyteller is allowed to include as many moral lessons as he or she likes.

A remarkable outcome of these experiments was that it appeared to be very difficult to include your own messages in these stories. In one experiment, an attempt from my side to include a very moralistic conservationist message failed. On the other hand, the atmosphere became very open and relaxed since all parties had the chance to actively participate in the process.

This technique led to a set of stories that provided insight into mutual interpretation of sentences. In fact it could be a very good introductory game to tune up the audience before starting real storytelling sessions. Although it did not lead to ready-made stories that could be used for further experiments, it did help to train my creativity and it was used as a source of inspiration for the composition of new stories.

9.4.2 The stories

In this section the three composed stories are presented. All three stories are dilemma stories ending with a question, leaving it to the audience to start a discussion. As has been explained in section 9.3.2, the role of the narrator is to stimulate this discussion, to explore different viewpoints and to follow the ensuing argument.

Each story deals with preferably one but sometimes more of the key themes. This includes some of the Milton questions as well as some other themes that have come up in the previous chapters, such as the concept of place and notions of care or fear.

The first story deals with responsibility, taking a historical point of view. The story is inspired by local story themes. I will mention two of these. First, the story starts with the situation of two animals being best friends. As we have seen in Chapter 5, many stories, both in Central Province as well as in the Far North, explain how this inseparable friendship can finally lead to conflict explaining the present situation of hostility between the two animal species. In the second theme the story deals with a dog that possesses the secret of hunting and gives it to another species. This is based on a story that was heard in Central Cameroon (box 9.3).

The story is a fable, it is entirely told from the perspective of the animals and in that sense the animals clearly represent people. Very briefly the dog is depicted as representing the supra-local western world and the lion as representing the local people. The introduction of a judge at the end of the story is also common in many local stories. It should be noted that in this story the judge is not a neutral third party but a lion. This was chosen so in order to bias the story to the point of view of the lions, *i.e.* the local people, since I expected this to be the best starting point for discussion.

The second story deals with the relation between environmental degradation and the spatial scale on which one can look at the problem. Moreover, it puts focus on the biological

concept of sustainability based on the maintenance of life circles. The story characters of large ants attacking a prey is derived from several stories in Central Province as well as from reports about these ants and their capability to attack.

Box 9.3: the secret of hunting
Ndjolé: Grand Martin, age 60, male, Baveck.

The nkanna is that you should never tell a woman what is under your belly, or as the white men say: what is your secret. So what happened?
A man had a dog. He used it for hunting. The dog could see the animals, he could even understand the language of all animals. Every time they went hunting the dog caught the animals and brought them to his owner. And his owner shared the animals with the dog. That is how it happened all the time. Every time when they went into the bush the dog said to his owner: "There is a wild boar over there. Let's go. Today we'll have a wild boar", and that is how they caught the boar. Another day the dog said "Over there, there are buffaloes, let's hunt the buffaloes." And that is how they caught the buffaloes. So one day the hunter asked his dog: "Every time we go hunting you choose which animals we are going to hunt. What has given you this power? Show me your power." The dog said: "Hmm, we cannot show you the secret because if we show it, you will not go with your wife anymore." The hunter said: "Show it to me, my wife will not do anything" but the dog said: "No we like you a lot but we can't, let's go hunting again. Today we'll get some hedgehogs." Every day the dog did the same. The hunter said: "Please show me your secret. The secret that enables you to understand the language of animals, to see them, to attract them." The dog said: "Hmmm, who is in your house, is there a woman there…" So the dog put some drops of the remedy in his eyes, in his nose and in his ears. Now the man could see the animals, even if they where far away, he could understand them, even smell them.
So the next day they went hunting, and they caught more animals then they could carry. Maybe ten or fifteen animals. He needed the whole village to carry them. His wife was surprised. "My husband, every day you go hunting, you catch animals but now the whole village has to carry. What happened? There must be a secret." "No, no, there is no secret." But the woman said: "We are living together, you have to tell me your secret." The dog heard it and thought: ahuuu, we have warned you. Look at what happens now.
The next day they went hunting again. The man said: "This time I will kill some buffaloes for you, not many, just two." That day he returned with two buffaloes and his wife was surprised. What is happening, she thought. If you have become a magician, I will divorce you. The hunter said: "Please, don't leave me. In two days I will tell you my secret." So the dog thought: ahuuu, I have warned you, look who has begun.
The man understood all the languages, including the language of the ants. That day, his wife was very angry, and she started to sweep the floor rigorously. Boem boem boem
So in a small corner, the ants came together and said: "That stupid woman there, every time we build a house, she destroys it. As soon as she sits down we are going to bite her." Because the man understood the language, he had to laugh. And his wife asked: "Why do you laugh?" The man said: "I know why I am laughing."

To be continued

Box 9.3 (continued)

Again she was angry, the woman sat down and was immediately bitten. She jumped and fell down on the ground. The man laughed. And the dog said: "ahuu we have well warned you. This is the beginning." His wife said: "Oh you are having a plot with the ants so that they bite me. Tell me your secret of hunting." And the hunter said: "Wait, the moment will come." That day he went hunting and came back with a lot of animals. There were some ants on a piece of wood. The woman took the wood and put it into the fire. The ants started talking: "That woman has come to cut our wood, she has taken it to the village and now she puts it in the fire. We will bite her as soon as she sits down. We will hurt her everywhere." The man, who understood the language started laughing again. So the woman said: "Why are you laughing? I know something will happen. I will not sit down in my usual place." So instead she sat down on the wood and she got bitten everywhere. She jumped and fell to the ground. The woman said: "I know you don't love me anymore. If you loved me, you wouldn't have done this to me. I asked you the secret of killing so many animals. You refused. Now always if you laugh, something happens. This time I will go away to my parents." Because the man loved his wife he tried to tease her. "No, no tomorrow I will tell you the secret." And the dog said: "Ahuu we have warned you. This is the beginning." The woman said: "If today you don't tell me I go to my parents." And the man started explaining: "Oh my wife I love you so." And the dog said: "Ahuu we have warned you. This is the beginning." So the hunter kept quiet but did not leave his house, he did not talk, did not go hunting. He became weaker and weaker. One day, the chickens were having a talk. "That horrible woman makes me angry. She always comes to take us, never the chicken of the cousins. Next time we will run away." The man heard it and started laughing again. The next day, the angry woman walked to the place of the chickens but they had all run away, knocking over the sauce. So the woman said: "If you don't tell me today I will go away." She took her suitcase but the man said: "No in the night I will tell you." So that night he said: "So you have seen that I kill a lot of animals, it is the dog who gave me the secret. After giving me the remedy I could see and smell them and understand their language. So when I heard the ants saying that they would bite you I could not tell you because of the secret." Outside the dog said: "Ahuu we have warned you." Some days later the man was dead and since that day we know that all animals understand the language of man. The animals communicate with people. It is our fault that animals don't talk with us anymore. For example: when a stranger arrives and you see a chicken passing by, this means you have to catch it for the honour of the stranger. If you put some grains on the ground the one you have to kill does not approach because it has heard the language of man. Before we talked with animals. Because of the woman we don't do it anymore. There is also a proverb: Don't tell a woman where you keep your secrets.

The third story deals with the value of nature for mankind. It relates to what has been discussed in Chapter 8 about the theme of compassion versus fear, and to the Milton question as to how people perceive nature as well as to the question of whether the value of nature is merely utilitarian (anthropocentric) or whether it also has an intrinsic value (eco-centric). The

character of Haman Gabtare is famous in stories in the Far North. It is similar to what the French call *'l'enfant terrible'*[5].

As may be noted the three example stories are largely inspired by elements from either the Far North or Central Province. This makes it especially interesting to compare the impact of each story in both regions. Telling a story based on themes from the Far North in Central Province, for example, may show how important the factor of recognition is for understanding and enjoying a story. Regarding the similarity of the story realm in both regions, however, I did not expect a difference between the two regions beforehand.

Story 1: The lion, the dog and the secret of hunting

The dog and the lion were the best of friends, inseparable friends. They always went together. One day they decided to go to a village to ask for the hand of the beautiful daughter of the sultan. Just before arriving in the village the dog said to the lion: "Well my friend, we are now going to look for the same woman, but you already have a woman. I am still alone. You should give me that woman and I will give you a surprise."

As you know the dog is a very good hunter; he can see buffaloes from a long way away. He can smell them; he can hear their noise from a very far distance. He can steal up upon his prey in silence. The dog had in mind to pass on this secret of hunting to the lion, as a reward for letting him have the girl. They arrived in the village with lots of presents for the chief and spent the night at the chief's house. The following day they returned home together with the girl. When they arrived at the point of separation the lion said: "Now I will give you the girl, so where is my present?"

The dog took the secret medicine out of its bag, rubbed it over and put three drops in the right eye and three drops in the left eye of the lion. The lion opened its eyes again and suddenly it could see far, smell far and hear far. The lion said: "Really, you have given me the secret of hunting!"

From that day on, they were even better friends. They always went hunting together and every day they came back home with buffaloes, elephants, and hippopotamus. Both the dog and the lion had a lot of children. Always though, when they went hunting, it was in the lion's territory. In the beginning the lion did not mind because he was so grateful for the dog's present. One day, however, the lion was tired of always receiving the dog. So he said to the dog: "Listen, dog, ever since we have been together, we have always hunted on my territory, why is this?"

The dog said: "Well my friend, I actually don't want to talk about this but I think it is inevitable. Since I have learned to be a great hunter, my children and I have caught almost all the animals in our place. You know that our medicine is very efficient, isn't it? So that is why

[5] According to the stories, Haman Gabtare was born after an extremely long pregnancy, varying in stories from two till seven years. He walked, talked and ate the same day he was born. From the first day on he was misbehaving, causing trouble for everyone around him, including the people who had helped him out earlier.

there is nothing left in my territory. And talking about this, in order to prevent us from hunting all the animals in your territory too, I think it is better you give me back the remedy."
"What???" said the lion, "You gave it to me and now you want it back? No way!"
The dog said: "Yes, I know but what else can we do? If we go on like this we will all die."
They quarrelled and quarrelled and quarrelled. Finally they decided to go to the court of justice. The judge was the son of the lion. The dog said: "The lion is hunting everything, he is stupid, he does not know how to manage his territory."
The lion said: "The dog wants to keep everything for himself, he first finished everything in his own home and now he comes to stop me."
The judge, since he was a lion, first wanted to kill the dog but than realised that this would also be the end of the secret medicine. That solution was no good. So what to do? Should he believe what the dog had told him? If the lion were to give back his medicine he too would die of hunger. If he were to keep the medicine all the animals would die and finally the lion would die too. So what should he do?

Story 2: The little boy and the ants

In a forest there is a clearing with a small waterhole. Every day small animals such as the squirrel, the hare and the hedgehog come to drink there. In the big trees around the waterhole there are big ants. These big ants attack the small animals by falling down on them in groups. The ants are able to kill these animals and eat them.
Right near the waterhole a little boy was living in a small house. He had discovered the small animals around the waterhole and when these animals were attacked by the ants, they were easy to catch. The boy caught the animals, shook them to free them from ants and took them home in order to cook. After eating them, he cleaned his house by sweeping the floor and putting the food remains on a garbage heap just next to his door.
One day the ants that lived in an anthill next to the house discovered the garbage heap which provided a lot of food for them.
This continued for a long time. The ants killed the animals and in that way provided food for the little boy. The boy took the animals, cooked them and after eating them he swept the food remains together on the heap. This heap provided additional food for the ants.
However, after some time the ants discovered that there was enough food on the heap so it was not necessary anymore to do the hard work of climbing into trees and attacking animals. They dedicated themselves more and more to the heap that provided plenty of food and the young ants did not know anything else than that of the rubbish heap, full of food. As a consequence, however, there were less and less ants going to the waterhole to attack the animals and so it was becoming harder for the boy to catch the animals around the waterhole. Finally the boy began to get hungry. He became weak, he didn't want to work anymore and he didn't sweep his house anymore.

One day, one of the ants got lost because he was not swept back to the heap, so he ended up in a new world, far away. Suddenly he saw the boy and said: " Wow, that must be God!"
The ant approached and said: "Mister, mister, what are you doing here?"
The boy answered: "I am just sitting but I should clean my house and sweep the floor, I should bring the rubbish to the heap over there."
The ant looked into the direction of the heap. So he has something to do with the food heap?, he thought. Indeed, he must be God. The ant was very astonished.
"But what is your problem now?"
"I'm too hungry to work ", said the boy.
"Too hungry, what do you mean?? There is plenty of food, I'll show you."
The ant took the boy to the heap, "There it is."
The boy sighed: "There is nothing here for me, it is just rubbish."
"What do you mean?" said the ant, "look at the nice little things in it, there are even healing herbs."
The boy could not see the richness that the ant saw but he understood what the ant was talking about.
"And you think all this exists by itself?" the boy said.
"Oh yeah, it has been there for ages. It will never change."
"But don't you realise that the heap is there because I work? I clean the house and this will end because I am hungry now. In the beginning your brothers helped me by killing those little animals at the waterhole. Now they don't do this anymore. The hunger will kill me and finally it will kill you too."
The ant went back to the heap and told his brothers about the strange experience far away; that he had encountered a huge and strange creature that said that his work was needed for their food, and in order to work the creature needed to eat the animals at the waterhole with the help of the ants.

In the ant colony there were different reactions. Many ants did not understand the relationship between the heap and the animals they killed at the waterhole. Some said: "if the person is God, he will manage to get his food in a different way. Look at the heap. It is so big, it won't finish, at least not in my lifetime nor that of my children. Why should I work hard for something I do not understand? Besides, if the heap finishes we can always go elsewhere."
Another group said: "No it is important that we understand the whole process, we should nourish the boy because we depend on each other. If we keep on working hard we can live like this forever, and the next generation can live a good life."
So, if you were one of the ants in the colony, after hearing this story and considering all different viewpoints, what would you do?

Story 3: Haman Gabtare and his destructive nature

You probably know Haman Gabtare. The day he was born after a pregnancy of nine years he appeared as a full-grown man that always misbehaved. Nevertheless, he was the only and beloved son of the chief. Haman always wanted to destroy everything. So he started beating his mother. His mother suffered and went to the chief. The chief told him that he should not beat his mother. Haman said: "Okay, but I have to beat someone."

So Haman started beating other women in the village. The women went to complain to the chief. The chief told Haman not to beat anyone in the village. Haman said: "Okay, but I have to beat someone."

Haman started beating the animals in the village, like the sheep and the cows. The animals suffered and the chief told Haman not to beat the animals. Haman said: "Okay, but I have to beat something."

Then Haman started beating the wild animals[6], the hare, the lion and even the elephant. Finally, they also went to the chief and the chief told him not to beat the wild animals. Haman said: "okay, but I have to beat someone."

Then Haman started to beat little insects like the butterfly. The butterfly complained to the chief and the chief told him not to beat a butterfly. Haman said: "Okay, but I have to beat something."

Finally, Haman started to beat the trees. He did not kill the trees but he broke off their twigs. In the beginning there was no problem because the trees did not complain, they did not care about Haman breaking off small pieces.

One day, however, the women of the village began to complain about the firewood that they had collected carefully from the brousse. All their twigs used for cooking were broken into very small pieces, too small to use. The women went to the chief and explained their problem. The chief told Haman not to break the twigs. Haman said: "That's fine but I have to beat something. I have first beaten my mother, then the women, the animals of the village, the wild animals, the insects and finally the trees. I do not care what I beat, you may choose, as long as I can beat something."

Now the chief had a very difficult dilemma: should he choose to help the women with the firewood or help the different animals and insects not to suffer from Haman? What should he do? What else could he find for Haman to beat?

9.5 Trying out the composed stories

9.5.1 Methodology

Having written the three stories, I returned to Cameroon in order to try them out in the field. In this section the methodology will be discussed.

[6] Note that here the local distinction between domesticated and wild animals is used.

For testing the stories I chose the same two regions to work in as I had visited for the collection of the stories. In each region I started my work in the villages I had visited during earlier fieldwork periods, and from there I chose some other villages in the region, including villages I had never visited before. In all cases I worked with an interpreter who told the story in the local language in order to make the debate accessible for everyone. One exception to this was a session with students from a high school who spoke French very well. Then I acted as the storyteller myself. The use of the native language is especially important since in natural storytelling sessions the audience is free to walk in and out and is therefore very heterogeneous. The same could be expected in the experimental situation. One exception to this natural setting was made during a session exclusively with women. I will return to this later.

In the next section I will discuss some details about the preparations before talking about the actual storytelling sessions.

9.5.1.1 Preparation

The most important part of the preparation was the training of the storyteller. For reasons explained in section 3.3, I did not opt for a line by line translation as did De Groot *et al.* (1995). Consequently, the role of the storyteller was very important. After all, the way in which the story is told may greatly influence the results. Therefore three days of preparation were scheduled in which the storyteller had to learn the story by heart. Moreover, the storyteller needed to know the background of the story, *i.e.* understand the underlying intention I had for the debate. The storyteller was not merely a narrator but also had to animate the debate by keeping it focused on the main themes and trying to keep the dilemma clear. Consequently, the storyteller preferably should be a supra-local person or at least be able to understand the dominant ideas of the supra-local level.

In all cases, storytellers were male and native speakers. In Central Province I was able to work with the same young man who assisted me in collecting the stories and who was both native Babouti and Baveck. In the Far North I had to look for a new person, a Fulbe from Maroua. Moreover, some additional experiments were done in a Mousgoum village with a Mousgoum man [7].

In order to train the storyteller, I told him the stories several times and gave him a tape on which the three stories were told by me in French. The next day I asked him to tell the three stories in French to me, so it was possible to make corrections and discuss several misunderstandings. After getting the story clear, I asked the storyteller to tell the story in the native language to a third person, and asked that person to relate the story back to me in

[7] The choice of the storyteller is an important parameter in the outcome of the experiments. Therefore it was preferable to work with the same person in all situations. On the other hand, for testing the practicability of using stories as a tool, it is desirable to work with several inexperienced storytellers, since this will be the case in most situations if storytelling were to be adapted as a general tool.

French. If he forgot or misunderstood anything the third person was allowed to ask the storyteller for explanation. This training was used as a base in all cases. In addition, many discussions were held with the storyteller about the underlying themes as well as about the importance of the narrator as a catalyst, which particularly meant that the narrator should not express his own opinion in the debate.

During this preparation time, the storyteller could also give feedback, which made it possible to improve the stories. As could be expected, details in the stories had to be adapted to the specific situations. The same happened during the sessions in the villages, so the stories got adapted all the time. It should be realised that a story is never told in the same way and the change in details was mostly contributing to the fun level, not the principles of the story. To give an example: in later versions of story 3 it was explained how the hare walked around with one ear, the lion without a beard and the horse with only three feet. These details made the story very visual and provoked much laughter among the audience.

However, some variations in the stories were more fundamental and these are important to mention here. These variations were mainly made in the initial phase to improve the comprehensibility of the story. The variations were especially related to the two different provinces indicating some differences in culture.

The first variation is related to one of the characters in story 1. At the end of story 1, the dilemma is put forward from the perspective of the judge. This makes the personality of the judge very important. For this reason, it was initially chosen to let the judge be a lion in order to emphasise the local perspective (see previous section). This did work out in the Far North. However, in Central Province it complicated the debate since the people there considered it to be impossible for a judge to defend his own 'race'. For policy (or politeness) reasons the judge, who was a lion, was supposed to defend the dog, even if he did not have agree with the dog. Since this could complicate the debate in a way that could affect the dilemma's content, it was decided to introduce a neutral judge.

The choice of the ants in story 2 was initially based on some stories I had collected in Central Province. Consequently, the story was well understood in this province. However, in the Far North these predatory ants do not occur and it was expected that the audience would have problems in imagining the situation. Therefore, it was decided to choose another predator. Surprisingly, my interpreter came up with an alternative which translated into French is 'wolf'. However, wolves do not occur in Cameroon and he was possibly referring to the striped hyena: *Hyaena hyaena* (Depierre and Vivien, 1992). Since this remains hypothetical I prefer to use the word 'wolf'.

The correspondence between ants and wolves is of course rather limited, and it was considered to be a potential problem in the story. In order to keep up the line of the story as much as possible, we opted for baby-wolves, being abandoned just like the boy was.

In Central Province the third story needed some slight alterations with respect to the main character's name. Haman Gabtare is a famous character in the stories from the Far

North but unknown in stories in Central Province. The name, Haman, did have a specific meaning in Central Province, however, referring to someone who exterminates everything. This would have put too much focus on the extinction of animals and trees rather than the act of mistreatment. Since the intention was to avoid the issue of extinction (after all, this theme was already very prominent in the first story) the third story was told without giving a specific name to the character.

9.5.1.2 Telling the stories

After preparing the narrator and selecting the villages, the villages were visited and people were informed that a storytelling evening would take place. Initially, no background information was given about the content of the stories. All sessions took place in the night, except the one with the young students that was done in the morning. In the Muslim areas the sessions started after the last prayer, at eight o'clock. Each session was animated by serving some preferred drinks or food, e.g. tea and cola nuts. Nine villages were visited in the Far North and four in Central Province. In each session all three stories were told separately, leaving time for the debate after each story. Table 9.1 shows the details of each session.

The debates were organised so that as much spontaneity as possible would be assured. In order not to interrupt the flow of arguments, the whole debate was recorded on tape and translated line-by-line the following day[8]. When the debate was finished or too many repetitions occurred it was concluded by asking the audience to vote. Finally, after the whole session the audience was asked to vote for the best story.

While transcribing the debate, a distinction was made among the reactions with respect to some characteristics of the participants. This included a distinction between gender and between different age groups (<30, 30-50, >50).

Having discussed the methodology I will now present the outcome of the experiments. In order to do so, I will divide this into two parts. Firstly, I will discuss the effect of the stories on the process itself, *i.e.* the debate. The question is: Did the stories do what they were expected to do? Or in other words: Did the stories provoke a debate in which people were able to express their opinions?

Secondly, I will zoom in on the content of the debates by analysing the literal texts as they were taped. The question relating to this part is: To what extent did the stories help to make people talk about the different aspects of the themes presented in the stories?

[8] Exceptions to this line-by-line translation were when the debate became too chaotic or arguments were repeated all the time. In these cases a summary was made.

	Village	Storyteller	Language	Place	Audience *	Details
1	Guividig	Moussa Abukar	Mousgoum	Public	40 -10 - 30	
2	Guividig	Moussa Abukar	Mousgoum	Semi-public	7 - 0 - 0	Only older men
3	Katwal	Aminou Oumarou	Fulfuldé	Private	20 - 1 - 50	
4	Mokolo	Natascha Zwaal	French	Semi-public	15 - 5 - 0	Young students
5	Pette	Aminou Oumarou	Fulfuldé	Semi-public	40 - 4 - 10	
6	Maya	Aminou Oumarou	Fulfuldé	Public	50 - 0 - 50	
7	Bagarisse	Aminou Oumarou	Fulfuldé	Semi-public	30 -10 - 10	
8	Pette	Aminou Oumarou	Fulfuldé	Private	0 - 30 - 60	Only women
9	Mindif	Aminou Oumarou	Fulfuldé	Public	60 - 4 - 0	
10	Ndjolé	Ambarra Martin	Baveck	Public	16 - 4 -20	
11	Ndjolé	Ambarra Martin	Baveck	Public	35 - 3 -10	
12	Essandja	Ambarra Martin	Baveck	Public	30 - 20 -20	
13	Nguila	Ambarra Martin	Babouti	Public	19 - 3 - 0	

* Estimation of numbers of men, women and children respectively

Table 9.1: Overview of the different debates and their characteristics

9.5.2 Results

9.5.2.1 The process of debating

Most storytelling sessions were done in a natural setting, starting with a group of at least twenty persons. One exception was in Guividig (2) where a session was done with seven old men. However, during most sessions other people joined the group in the course of the debates and in some cases there were up to 150 people. In Katwal (3) this led to a chaotic situation in which everybody started to talk at the same time so we finally decided to move to a private location *i.e.* the backyard of the chief. Although that reduced the number of participants, it did not stop people from climbing over the wall to join in the meeting. This is a strong indicator of the success of the storytelling experiment. Whatever its usefulness for active thinking, or even for nature conservation, may turn out to be, storytelling as such seems to be a medium of great potential.

In table 9.1, estimation is given of the number of people that seriously attended the different sessions.

In all thirteen sessions that took place the three stories elicited lively debates. The intensity of the debate varied but in all cases it started spontaneously after telling the story. The most listless situation was in Maya (6), a traditional Fulbe village in which people were

not used to foreigners and even less to participatory sessions. In this case the animator had to personally address some individuals in the audience to start the debate. In most cases the debates did not end by themselves but were stopped at a certain moment in order to vote. In general, each session (containing three stories) took between two and three hours. Since it took only about ten minutes to tell each story, most of this time was spent on the debate. However, in some cases the debates continued after the session. In Mindif (9), after finishing the session in the night, a group of young men asked me to re-open the debate (after most participants had left to go home) because "they had not finished yet."

Another example of the impact of the debate was in Pette (5). When I visited this village for the second time, three days after the first session, I heard a group of older men still discussing the first story under the village tree.

As was expected, the role of the animator was important for guiding the debate. This could be seen clearly because the animator was often personally addressed during the debate. Surprisingly, in none of the cases was my presence mentioned nor did it appear to influence the debate to any noticeable degree.

In all cases the debate was animated by several participants in the audience. All participants were able to express their opinion. The extent of expression was not influenced by age, in other words young and old were reacting to each other and no restrictions were found with respect to the right to speak or speak first. However, this was different for the gender aspect. In the Far North, women were forming a small minority in the audience (see table 9.1) and were hardly participating in the debate. In Central Province this was completely different. Women were often very well represented in the audience and highly participating in the discussions as well. The difference between the two regions can be easily explained by the fact that the Far North is mainly Moslem and therefore women are not allowed to openly express their opinion in the presence of men. For this reason a separate session was held in Pette (8) exclusively with women, in order to get an impression of their perceptions with respect to the stories.

In none of the debates was a full consensus reached except with the first story with the old men in Guividig (2), probably because the group was small, homogeneous and used to collective decision-making. In all other cases the debate continued until the audience was asked to vote. In all cases people said that they had enjoined the sessions, for example by asking when I was coming back again with some new stories. Table 9.2 shows the different preferences of the audience with respect to the three stories.[9] As can be seen, in all villages the audience largely prefered story 1. The main reason for this was that people thought the dilemma to be the most 'tough' to solve. However, the third story was considered the most humourous in most villages, especially because lively details were added about how the animals were mistreated.

[9] the numbers do not include the children that assisted, only sub-adult and adult votes were counted.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Story 1	28	4	31	15	>40	19	21	21	11	10	24	19	12
Story 2	1	2	6	2	2	13	13	6	6	5	8	19	4
Story 3	3	1	11	3	1	4	3	2	7	6	8	10	6
No vote	20	0	0	0	0	>30	>30	6	>40	10	>20	10	0

Table 9.2: Number of people preferring each story in the different villages

9.5.2.2 Analysing the debates

In this subsection I will go into the details regarding the content of the debates. In order to do so, I will first discuss the stories separately. Furthermore, in annex 5 some examples are given of the literal transcription of the debates.

In the analyses several aspects are important. First of all it is important to see whether the stories have succeeded in 'setting the agenda', in other words: do the debates refer to the themes indicated in the stories? If this is the case, it is furthermore interesting to note people's opinion with respect to these themes. This can be seen most clearly in the final vote with respect to the dilemma, but also during the debate by the process of forming, changing or keeping one's opinion. In addition to this, it is finally important to see how these opinions are grounded, in other words: the line of argumentation during the debate.

Story 1: The lion and the dog with the secret of hunting

This story, which was unanimously chosen to be the best story, provoked intense debates in all the villages. As we can see from table 9.3, in most cases the final vote was quite balanced between the lion and the dog. Two obvious exceptions are Guividig (2) in which everybody supported the lion, and case 8 in which the dog was supported by all but one villager. In both cases the group was more homogenous than in an average situation. In Guividig (2) there were only seven participants who were all elderly men. This may explain why the debate was more limited and opinions were formulated right from the beginning. Pette (8) was also a special case. It was a group of women who were brought together by the chair woman of this group. When analysing the literal text of the debate it can be concluded that during the sessions there were four women expressing arguments for the dog and five for the lion. However, since the chief herself, who was quite dominant in the debate, supported the dog this may have influenced the final voting of the other participants.

Case 2 shows that the final voting may have been different from the opinions expressed during the debate. After all, although everybody voted for the lion, there still had been a discussion. Apart from this specific case in which the composition of the group was exceptional, it may also be a natural process in which people change their opinions during the

debate. Interestingly, it was indeed noticed that during the debate individual people were able to change their opinion. Halfway through the debate in Guividig (1), for example, a young man said: *"In the beginning we all analysed it in such a way that the lion was right, but after I have listened to what he said (referring to one of the participants) I begin to see that it is rather the dog who is right."*

In fact this is what happened in many debates. In all cases except village 4, 7 and 8 the debate started with arguments that only supported the lion. Gradually, the debate shifted to a more balanced position. The turn in the debate was often initiated by one person introducing a new argument. In order to understand this process let me first focus on the arguments.

The arguments given for each party were of course varying. The main arguments given to support the lion were that he had given the girl in confidence and that the dog was only looking for his own rewards. It was simply perceived to be unfair that the lion had to return the secret. The main argument for supporting the dog was that the dog was much more clever than the lion since he understood that something had to be done to avoid problems in the future. In two cases the incoherent conclusion was drawn that the dog was automatically more clever than the lion since he possessed the secret. In most cases it was stated that it was precisely the experience the dog had had in his own region that has made him wise.

Interestingly, the same arguments could be easily used for defending both characters. The fact that the dog had waited until the lion started to ask questions instead of discussing the problem before, was in many cases seen as proof that the dog was only looking at his own gain. In Ndjolé (10) and Essandja (12), however, someone explained that the dog did not have a choice. He was living in an impasse since he had discovered the problem too late and was risking his life when touching upon this problem since the lion may have become very angry. This idea evoked compassion and sympathy for the dog. As a result, the debate turned completely, leading to the final vote of a majority that supported the dog. It may show how subtle variations, introduced by a single person can influence the process a lot.

In most debates people came up with the idea that if the lion had to return the secret of hunting, then the dog had to return the girl. Although formally just, this solution was not satisfying for my initial purpose of the debate. To avoid that the debate would conclude by this pseudo-solution, the role of the animator was very important. Although it was not discussed during the preparation time, the animator avoided it by the *impromptu* intervention that this solution was not possible because the girl had already grown old. In some cases the argument was made stronger by explaining that she had had so many children that she had become very old and that she was even going to die soon. The lion could thus never exchange the secret for the girl. This brought back the discussion to the main focus. Meanwhile, the side discussion led to some amusing moments such as in Ndjolé (11) were a villager remarked: *"The dog and the gorilla had the same problem in another story, always with marrying a woman. Who is this woman that two men always want to fight for?"*

Another pseudo-solution that came up was to simply kill the dog. This could have been easily solved by the animator by stating that this was impossible since then the secret of hunting would also be lost (as was already mentioned in the story).

Probably more important than the final vote is the fact that the opinions were mostly based on underlying assumptions that also showed up during the debate. One prominent problem was the question of whether the dog told the truth or whether he was just lying to abuse his friend. Interestingly, with respect to this question a clear difference has been found between the Far North and Central Province. In the Far North, this question was hardly asked and if it was asked it was done so by one individual, mostly an older man. In general, however, everybody accepted the idea that animals could disappear in a certain region. However, this idea of disappearing did not necessarily imply an irreversible process. In Mokolo (4) some people came up with the conviction that the animals had just fled to the territory of the lion, and if the lion would keep on hunting and the dog had stopped hunting, animals would return to the region of the dog again. Contrary to this idea of reversibility, an old man in Guividig (2) said that he had heard about the warnings of the Europeans but he thought it would be inevitable that the world would deteriorate since this was also written in the Koran. Consequently, there is no need for people to try to change this process. Although the two ideas are very different they both lead to a passive attitude with respect to the process of finding solutions.

In Central Province, on the other hand, many more people, including younger ones, doubted the faithfulness of the dog since it was considered to be impossible that animals could disappear completely. In Ndjolé (11), a vast majority of the participants explained that it was impossible to exterminate the animals since there were two categories: the animals from beneath and the animals from above. With this, they probably referred to the habitat in which these animals can be found. The dog was only able to kill the animals from beneath and could thus never finish them all. The conclusion was that there was no need to worry about what the dog had said and that the lion was right to keep the secret.

The difference between the two regions with respect to this theme could be explained by the fact that most villages in the Far North have been visited in the past by NGOs explaining the environmental problems in the region whereas the villages in Central Province had not yet been visited by any environmental NGO and were thus less accustomed to deal with these ideas.

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**
Lion	10	7	9	4	13	20	9	1	13	5	20	8	7
Dog	10	0	14	8	11	37	13	22	18	15	24	18	10
Alternative	4	0	0	8	0	1	0	0	0	6	0	0	0

Table 9.3: Final vote with respect to story 1 in the different villages (not everybody voted).

Apart from the discussion about who was right, the next step was to find out how to solve the problem. This was probably one of the most prominent differences indicating the varying levels of the different debates. Some of the debates were restricted to speculation about the intentions of both parties. Here people just voted for one of the two animals according to their feeling of justice. Many debates, however, started with a simple discussion about who was right but went beyond this stage. During a heavy discussion in Mindif (9) an old man suddenly remarked: *"It is not a coincidence that the dog and the lion are friends, the situation is more complex. There is more to say about the problem although it is just a little story."* This was directly followed by the remark of a younger man who stated: "*This is precisely why we have to stop talking like this, we have to find solutions for the future of the animals."*

In Mokolo (4), one young student remarked: *"We do not know whether the dog is a liar who wants to abuse the lion or whether he is really having the best intentions but we have to solve the problem anyway. If the lion and the dog do not find a solution, they will all die at the end."*

As we can see from table 9.3, in Mokolo as well as in some other villages, people tended to come up with an alternative answer to the dilemma. As we read in section 9.7, alternative answers were not included in the initial story and were thus formulated by the villagers themselves during the debate. Not surprisingly, these alternatives were mostly developed among the group of young scholars (village 4), whose debate was the most sophisticated probably because of their high level of education. As we can see from the final vote in the different villages, not everybody automatically accepted the alternative to be the best solution.

The alternatives mentioned were similar in the different cases:

1 Let the dog and the lion hunt more moderately or more intelligently (villages 1, 4, 5, 11),
2 Let the chief divide the week in two parts: three days for the lion and three day for the dog to hunt in the area where there are still animals (villages 3, 4, 5, 7),
3 Let the lion give back part of his secret instead of the whole secret (village 5),
4 Let the chief manage what is left of the territory and give part to the lion and part to the dog (villages 1, 13),
5 Let the dog hunt but he has to give part of the revenues to the lion (village 4),
6 Let the chief isolate a little space where he can breed the animals (villages 4, 12).

As we can see many of these alternatives link to insights of environmentalists. Many of them involve a regulatory power (the chief) to organise the solution. In other words, people envisage institutions to provide solutions. The last alternative can be easily seen as a stepping-stone to wider ideas such as the creation of a nature reserve. However, as has been indicated before, the fact that alternatives were mentioned during the debate did not automatically mean that people preferred these in their final vote. Many villagers thought it

would be more important to punish one party in order to re-establish the moral social order instead of looking for a practical solution. Like an old man said in Pette (5): *"Even if the lion and the dog could divide their hunting time the dog still has to be punished by taking away his wife since he has not treated his friend correctly. So I prefer that the lion keeps his territory. "*

Finally, remember that the story has been initially composed as a metaphor for the human world. Although this was never told to the villagers, it was mentioned by the villagers in three debates (5, 11, 12). At the end of the debate people themselves came up with the comparison between the lion being the African people and the dog being the "Europeans"[10]. In all cases this observation was used as an argument to support the opinion of the dog. One may raise the issue that here we may run the same risk as in the story of De Groot *et al.*(1995), namely that people may support the dog because they are afraid to offend the supra-local storyteller. However, as we have seen the crucial difference is that in this story the storyteller is not included in the story and can easily take the position of the lion to animate a further debate.

Story 2: The little boy and the ants (or baby wolves)

As with story 1, this story also provoked intense and varied debate. As has been explained in the previous section, the ants in Central Province had been replaced by baby wolves in the Far North. This was not foreseen when the story was composed and it could have been a problem for the understanding of the story. After all, the difference in scale of perceiving the world was well illustrated between the boy and the ants. Baby wolves are much bigger than ants and the rubbish heap may thus appear to be much smaller and much more limited to these wolves. Surprisingly, it appeared to be no problem for the villagers to understand the idea of scale difference between the baby wolves and the boy. All villagers in the Far North could easily imagine this scale difference and it seemed to be quite acceptable to them that the baby wolves saw the rubbish heap as something infinite.

However, the story did appear to suffer from another problem. In many debates people tended to think from the point of view of the boy or even from the viewpoint of the external narrator who is an outsider. Therefore, it had to be emphasised many times during the debate that it was important to take the viewpoint of the little animals. Taking into account the continuous need for this accentuation, people finally voted as shown in Table 9.4[11].

Most arguments mentioned to underpin any opinion were related to the idea of future. This raised the discussion as to whether one should worry about the future at all or just wait and hope for finding new solutions when the problem would present itself. Most villagers

[10] Interestingly, the division (European-African) made by the villagers is much more generalised and culturally determined than the distinction between local and supra-local made by myself.

[11] Without accentuation people tended to vote more for the option of getting back to work and restoring the cycle.

finally agreed that it is important to think about the future. However, there were serious opponents, especially among the elders. This was expressed in a typical way by an older man from Pette (5) using the proverb: *"Why choose the sun if one can sit in the shade?"*

Investing in the future is only done when one can be sure enough of receiving the benefits later. This has everything to do with trust. It was argued that the predators took a high risk by going to hunt again since they could never be sure whether the boy would continue to maintain the rubbish heap. Consequently, most of the villagers that opted for restarting the hunt did so under the express condition that the boy promised to maintain the rubbish heap.

Furthermore, the issue of reciprocity was discussed. In some villages the idea of the cycle of life was highlighted as an ideal situation. In Mokolo (4) a student said that God had created the world in such a way that all creatures are depended on each other so you have to respect this cycle. You gain valuable benefits by working for it. Although most villagers understood that both the predators and the boy profited from each other, many had problems with the issue of consciously working for each other. According to them, the boy had not realised that the predators worked for him as he never worked to give something back to the predators. According to many villagers it was just coincidence that the ants discovered the rubbish heap since the boy was never willing to give them something or to work for them. The rubbish heap was just a place for the boy to put the rubbish for which he had never made any effort. Many villagers stated that the ants could easily live without the boy whereas the boy could not live without the ants. An ant, staying on the heap could even make the boy more lazy. In Nguila (13) villagers opted for restarting the hunt but after a period in which the boy had to suffer so that he would realise that things do not come automatically. However, this argument was also contradicted by arguing that if the ants would not restart their hunting now they would risk forgetting how to do it in future or they would risk becoming too lazy, so they would finally die when the heap finished. Moreover, the boy could extort the ants by burning the rubbish heap or even killing the ants. After all, the boy is much bigger than the predators. Apart from this discussion, the statement of dependency also led to different feelings with respect to the boy, varying from compassion for the boy to blaming him for being stupid while 'making' a heap. This thus brought the discussion back to an unintended focalisation point.

In Essandja (12) an interesting issue was raised that is related to the capability to fully enter into the position of the ant: the question of whether you should always believe what others tell you. After all, the whole story was told by a fellow ant that had heard the story from an abstract creature. One of the participants said that precisely because everybody always believes what others say he would not simply accept the story of the boy as a reason for restarting a hard job.

As in story 1, some side discussions were raised such as the importance of the waterhole for the presence of the animals, details about the content of the rubbish heap or how it

happened that both the boy and the animals were living without their parents. In the first side discussion (in Mindif; 9) however, the villagers themselves responded: "*forget these details, let us focus on the real problem."*

In Guividig (1) and Bagarisse (7) a side discussion was raised about the extinction of animals. The fact that the boy was apparently profiting from the ants without being aware of this made people think that he was continuously taking away the small animals. This led people to the opinion that it would be better if the ants stayed on the heap so that the animals could come and drink in peace. Surprisingly, this debate on leaving animals in peace took place was triggered by story 2 although it was anticipated in the debate on story 1, which had this as its main subject. The fact that this theme was discussed in connection with story 2 indicated that there may have been some influence from the debate on story 1. In other words, the debate on story 2 was partly a continuation of the first one. Although the extinction issue could be formally called a side discussion of story 2 (since it was not touching on the main dilemma of that story) the discussion was considered to be interesting and was therefore not interrupted by the interpreter. One discussion took place between an older man who believed that animals could not become extinct since God had placed them there and since time immemorial people have been hunting, and a younger man who stated that it was clear that today there are less animals than there used to be. As has been noticed in local stories, the idea came up that animals have moved away rather than that they have become extinct.

As with story 1, in the debates on this story we may also distinguish two levels. The first level deals with the question of who is right, referring to themes such as egoism and laziness. On a deeper level this discussion was replaced by the question of how the problem could be solved in the most satisfying way. As in story 1, in some villages people themselves came up with some alternative ideas. In all but one village (Nguila, 13) these alternatives were proposed by young people. In Mokolo (4) it was a girl who proposed first. The most frequently mentioned idea was that the predator should restart his job for half of the time and in the remaining days he should just profit from the rubbish heap. A similar alternative was raised in Ndjolé (10) in which a system of shift-work was proposed. One group of ants had to restart the hunt while the other group could stay on the heap to have a rest. As in the debates of story 1, the proposal of an alternative was not necessarily accepted to be the best solution by everyone. As we can see in table 9.4, only in Pette (5), was the alternative largely supported by the audience.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Restart hunting	19	3	20	15	5	9	20	20	25	1	22	50	12
Stay on the heap	2	4	8	9	6	14	6	9	31	13	23	4	4
Alternative	3	0	1	1	10	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	2

Table 9.4: Final vote with respect to story 2.

Story 3: ***The bad boy and his destructive character***

The theme of story 3 appeared to be a much more difficult subject for discussion than the themes of the two former stories. First, because there was a misunderstanding with respect to the central theme of the story. The story was meant to raise the issue of the different values of nature (notably utility values versus intrinsic values) by using the example of mistreating individual creatures. The dilemma intended to raise the difference in value between species by focussing on the gesture of mistreating rather than on the idea of destroying the species as a whole. However, in many cases villagers raised the point of scarcity. In other words: after listening to the story most villagers understood that Haman would finally destroy all the trees, all the animals etc. Consequently, the debates focussed more on the vital need of these elements for people than on the different values of the different creatures as such. This very much complicated the debates. It would for example be very plausible to state that in case of total destruction, trees are most important to avoid desertification. Or as a villager in Katwal (3) stated: "*butterflies are very important but if there are no trees left, they cannot even sit*." It should be clear that although formally right this was not the intention of the debate since it did not touch on what was meant to be the central theme (see previous section). To avoid the misunderstanding, much emphasis had to be put by the storyteller on the gesture of mistreating, such as by giving many examples like cutting the ears or breaking the legs. In addition, it was emphasised that the animals did not die but only suffered a lot[12]. It was furthermore emphasised that the wood would never disappear since Haman was unable to destroy all the wood, but that only the women had to leave again to look for the wood.

Related to this was another complicating factor that looking for wood is essentially a task for women in most Cameroonian societies. Consequently, the answer to the dilemma in the story could be expected to be more gender-related than the other two stories. I will return to this later in this section.

Although the story was initially designed to end with one dilemma, it appeared to be more easy for the discussion to make a subdivision and to compare the utility value of the wood with the value of the different categories separately (insects, animals of the village, wild animals and women respectively, see also final vote in table 9.5).

[12] Because of the human-like character of animals in many local stories it was easy to imagine how animals could cry, scream or express any other emotion.

At first sight most of the villagers did not understand why you should protect something that does not have a direct use for people. Consequently, as we can see in table 9.5, not beating the trees was largely preferred over not beating any of the different animals mentioned. This was extensively grounded in the fact that wood is a most vital need for people. Wood is important for cooking, heating and building houses and furniture such as beds. Therefore the task of searching for wood has always been very time consuming and most people found it unacceptable to burden the women with extra work. In Mokolo (4), the young audience considered trees to be very important since they were providing oxygen.

Nevertheless, in almost all cases there were at least one or two villagers raising counter-arguments. Many of these arguments were still based on what can be called a utility value. For this reason, domesticated animals received much more support than the rest. Animals of the village, for example, were defended in some debates because they were useful for providing goods or services for people. A horse or donkey could even be used as a means of transport to search for wood further away in case Haman had destroyed the wood in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, when discussing the position of wild animals and insects, most arguments expressed the harmful side of these animals[13]. Elephants, hedgehogs and even butterflies were perceived to be harmful since they destroy the fields. Therefore, many villagers found the activities of Haman to be a good solution for getting rid of these animals. Furthermore, weakening the animals would make them easier to catch (discussion in villages 7, 10, 13): *"Wild animals are our first enemies, they are made for eating"* (Ndjolé, 10). Even in the villages (3, 5) where these animals were not seen as harmful, they were at least considered to be useless. *"I am seventy years old now but I have never seen the use of a butterfly. How can one ever work for a butterfly?"*

Although everybody accepted the fact that animals themselves were complaining in the story and that they were thus experiencing grief, the issue of compassion was seldom raised in the debates. Quite the contrary, the 'tasty' details about cutting ears and legs elicited great laughter among the audience rather than expressions of feeling sorry for the animals. For this same reason, in most villages the story was indicated to be the most amusing one of the three stories. As expressed by a young man from Ndjolé (10): *"it is not up to me to look after their lives, really if I am cutting the throat of a horse I do not have the slightest emotion."* In several cases people said that it was even good to beat the domesticated animals since they were made for being beaten. "*Their capacity increases if they are beaten.*"

However, in some villages different arguments where given defending the fact that each animal has the right to live even if it is not of direct use for people. The debate by particularly the young people in Mokolo (4) elaborated on this theme. It was mentioned for example that butterflies are only beautiful and even if we do not know, they may be of use to other people, such as scientists and tourists. This was contradicted by arguing that scientists and tourists

[13] Since I had expected this, I had initially chosen the butterfly with the idea of having a rather harmless character. However, butterflies were also accused of being harmful, since they destroy plants and food crops.

were not of importance for the decision of a local villager. One step further in the same debate was made by the remark of a girl who said that even if nobody knows its use, the animal has the right to live, just like humans do. The importance of an animal was validated by an element of the story itself: *"The fact that animals complain and the wood does not, shows that animals are important"* (Essandja, 12). *"One soul is equal to another soul"* (Mindif, 9). The argument was raised in more villages and was often underpinned by the fact that God had created these beings and he must have had a reason for doing so. In Ndjolé (11) this led to a discussion about a text from the Bible in which God asks the people to look after the animals.

In contrast to the former two stories no alternative solutions could be given. On some occasions people sighed that Haman should be better killed but this was no real option since he was the most beloved son of the sultan.

	Conserving: Tree or insect (butterfly)		**Conserving: Tree or domesticated animals**		**Conserving: Tree or wild animals**		**Conserving: Tree or women**	
1	∞	0	∞	0	∞	0	0	∞
2	7	0	7	0	7	0	0	7
3	∞	2	∞	1	∞	2	0	∞
4	18	2	18	2	18	2	1	19
5	∞	1	∞	13	∞	4	13	∞
6	∞	1	∞	9	∞	2	0	∞
7	30	14	23	23	18	12	12	30
8	∞	0	∞	0	∞	0	17	∞
9	20	4	12	12	20	4	0	∞
10	∞	1	∞	5	∞	3	1	∞
11	∞	1	∞	6	∞	1	0	∞
12	23	3	12	14	16	10	0	∞
13	∞	2	10	5	10	3	0	∞

Table 9.5: Final vote with respect to story 3 (∞ means: the rest of the audience, left colums represent vote for conservating trees).

Surprisingly, the choice of leaving the animals in peace in return for more work for the women (*i.e.* collecting the wood) was often defended by women themselves. This was especially obvious in the sessions in Central Province in which women showed active participation in the debates. As has been noticed before, the idea of the animals having a value on their own was often supported by women. In Essandja (12), a woman received applause from the audience after stating that she was prepared to work harder in order to avoid the suffering of animals since *"the degree of suffering from working could never be*

compared with the suffering from being mistreated." Apart from this minority, most villagers voted for the well-being of the women, which explains why women should not be beaten (see table 9.5). In Guividig (1) an old man stated: *"our happiness is linked to that of our women. Animals are unimportant."*

9.5.3 Comparing the thirteen sessions as a whole

After I have discussed the three different stories separately, in this section it may be interesting to look at the sessions as whole and explore the differences between the villages. However, it appears to be very difficult to draw clear conclusions on the basis of thirteen cases especially since there were many changing parameters such as the fact that the sessions were led by different facilitators. I will limit myself to some general remarks here.

As we have seen, in almost all cases the sessions were well animated. With respect to content, the most interesting and varied debates took place in Essandja (12), Nguila (13), Pette (5) and Mokolo (4) whereas the least varied discussions took place in Guividig (2) with the old men and in Pette (8) with the group of women. This is not surprising if we look at the composition of the audience. Apparently, a numerous and heterogeneous group is favourable for the debate. An exception to this is the students from Mokolo (4). Although it was a relatively small and homogeneous group the debate was the richest one of all. The reason for this could be the fact that all participants had a high level of education. The level of education could thus be another important factor determining the richness of a debate.

Related to the quality of the debate is the capacity of the audience to surpass the dilemma and come up with some alternative solutions. This especially counts for the dilemmas of the first and the second story. Here again, Mokolo had the highest score. This could be explained by the suggestion that a good debate would trigger the audience to come up with new solutions. Indeed, no alternative solutions were found among the old men in Guividig (2) and the women in Pette (8). However, exceptions were also found. Essandja (12), which had good debates did not find any alternatives for both dilemma's. On the other hand, two villages with a moderate level of debate: Guividig (1) and Ndjolé (10) did come up with alternative ideas to solve the dilemma.

Furthermore, it may be interesting to see whether there is a consistency in the attitude of the audience with respect to the environment and the themes related to environmental problems. This implies that we might expect the same person protecting the lion in story 1 to advise the ants in story 2 to stay at the heap and not to restart their work, because this person does not consider the future and the potential danger of the extinction of a species to be of major concern. Equally, it may be hypothesised that such a person would not be very concerned with the rights of the animals in the third story. Looking at the general votes, we can largely see such a trend, especially between the outcomes of story 1 and story 2. A clear exception to this is Ndjolé (10). Here most people voted for the dog in the first story while only one person advised the ants to restart their work in the second story. In story 3 the supra-

local vision (protecting the animals) was in general much more absent. In all villages only a minority of the audience took the side of the animals. This is not surprising when we bear in mind that the notion of care and compassion was found to be almost absent in local stories (see chapter 6). Although, only the women of Pette (8), the old men in Guividig (2) and the mixed audience in Guividig (1) unanimously voted to mistreat the animals. In all other villages the theme of compassion and animal rights did show up in the debates.

A final remark I want to make is with respect to gender. As has been discussed earlier, the role of women in the debates was very limited in the Far North. Moreover, the evening in Pette (8), organised with women only, did consist of relatively weak debates. Interestingly, their votes in story 1 and 2 were very much in favour of the environment. In the Central Province, on the other hand, women often actively participated in the discussions. Moreover, several of these women initiated a new line in the debate, in some cases advocating a supra-local vision on the environment. This is especially interesting as far as the third story is concerned. After all, the dilemma of this story was gender based (women had to collect the wood). In two cases (Essandja, (12) and Nguila, (13)) a woman was the first to declare that she was willing to work harder to collect wood in order not to mistreat the animals.

9.5.4 Lessons learned from the experiments

Considering the results presented in the former section, what can we learn from these experiments? I will explore this by discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the three stories.

Strengths of the stories: fulfilled expectations

If we compare the results of the experiments to the results obtained by De Groot *et al.* (1995) we observe that the discussions in all three cases have been more polarised than in case of De Groot *et al.*. As a result, the discussions did not end prematurely and even had the potency to continue independently after the sessions. There may be several reasons for this difference. As in the former sections I would like to make a distinction between the process of debating, and the content of the stories and debates.

With respect to the process of the debate, the storyteller probably plays the most important role, as he is also the animator who leads the debate. In the case of the three stories the animator could easily stimulate discussion. Apart from the talents of the animator, this was facilitated by the fact that the different story characters forming the parties in the dilemmas were impersonal. The impersonality had three main advantages. Firstly, because of the impersonal nature of the debate the social position of the animator was less important. This highly contrasts with the experiment of De Groot *et al.* in which the status of the animator was considered to be one of the most determining factors (see De Wit & Van Est, 2000). Secondly, since the animator was not personally linked to the dilemma, it was possible for him to switch from one opinion to the other, or to speak up for different parties at

different moments for the purpose of intensifying the debate. Thirdly, the impersonal character of the debates also provided an atmosphere in which people felt free to express their opinion without being concerned about political correctness or socially desirable answers.

The impersonality of the dilemma and the debates can be considered to be a big strength in the intercultural dialogue especially because the potential storyteller or animator is in many situations not a neutral person. Quite the contrary, if you want to use stories for intercultural communication as foreseen in the initial objective, these stories will thus often be told by supra-locals, e.g. environmental NGOs. The stories used for the experiments offer a way to reduce the difference in status that is so often experienced in situations where local participation sessions are held.

The second set of reasons for the difference between the three stories and the story of De Groot *et al.* is related to the content of the discussion. It could be hypothesised that the three stories were touching on themes that gave more food for debate than did the story of De Groot *et al.*. The reason that the three stories provided more debate could have been two-fold. In the first place it may have been caused by the simple fact that people were in more disagreement on these themes than they were on the dilemma of De Groot *et al.*. This is highly doubtful however, since the complex theme of De Groot *et al.* did not differ much in essence from the more simple themes in the three stories. One could, for example, have expected as much discussion on the dilemma about the animals who wanted to have space to live (story De Groot *et al.*) than about the dog that warned the lion of a scarcity of animals in the future (story 1). It is more likely to conclude that the dilemmas mentioned in the three stories were less complex and comprehensive than those of De Groot *et al.* (see section 9.3.3). This made it easier for people to have concrete discussions. Besides the initial purpose to unravel the complex theme of nature conservation in sub-themes in order get more insight in people's underlying ideas, it seems also to be favourable for the process itself. Apparently, a good debate needs a minimum of input to be provoked but is also restricted by maximum of complexity to keep a certain concreteness in order not to get lost.

Weaknesses of the stories

Although it appears that with the three dilemma tales some progress is made with respect to earlier experiments of De Groot *et al.*, there are still some weaknesses that could be detected. One of the most prominent weaknesses is whether the stories have been the most adequate way to discuss certain themes. As we have seen the details put in the story on the one hand enriched the story and made it more attractive for listening. On the other hand, many details provoked misunderstandings or side discussions. Minor complications had been filtered by the first sessions with the storyteller, such as the choice of the predator (story 2) or the side meaning of the name of Haman (story 3), but still there remained some more severe difficulties.

I will shortly discuss the main problem of each story, ***i.e.*** the importance of the character of the judge (story 1), the importance of focalisation, e.g. thinking from the viewpoint of the predator (story 2) and the difference between mistreating an animal and exterminating it (story 3).

The choice of lion as a judge in story 1 has been explained in section 9.6.2. It was initially meant to sharpen the dilemma by giving more credits to the lion. However, sharpening the dilemma could probably better be done in the story itself by using different focalisations (***i.e.*** giving room to both characters to express themselves) than by using a biased judge. As we have learned from these experiments, the bias of this judge because of being a lion is hard for an outsider to assess. To avoid this, if choosing the narrative construction of a judge in a story, it should always be as neutral as possible.

The problem encountered with story 2 was not due to the incapability of the audiences to place themselves in a position other than their own position as a human being. As has already been clear from the first story as well as from many stories villagers have told, people are well able to imagine themselves in the position of an animal. After all, imagining from the position of the ant did not appear to be impossible for the villagers. It only needed to be emphasised during the debate. This emphasis could probably have been done better while telling the story. The misunderstanding might have been avoided by telling the whole story from the viewpoint of the ant, in other words: by changing the focalisation in the whole story.

The problem encountered in story 3 may also be due to a focalisation problem. If the story had been told from the perspective of one animal and one woman instead of a more general group or species, the issue of extinction could probably have been avoided.

The discussed difficulties may have shown the intricacy of inventing a good story. In practice one can probably never avoid side discussions. This problem could be partly solved by the animator who had the main task of keeping the discussion focussed. Side discussions could be partly avoided by using the right focalisation and choosing the right characters in the story.

Related to the complexity of a story is the fact that many stories did touch on several themes at the same time. This also became clear in the debates. Many issues came back in several stories. It shows that although I tried to simplify the dilemma's by focussing on one of the specific questions of Milton (as was recommended in section 9.1), one could not avoid touching on the other questions at the same time. It could also not be denied that one story may have influenced the next one. This was most clear in the discussion about the extinction of species that, although meant to be the main theme of story 1, only came up after telling story 2. Because one can never be sure which underlying motivations are included, it would be very difficult to filter concrete answers with respect to each of the questions asked by Milton by simply putting them in a dilemma story.

Another weakness is that in spite of the intensive debate little can still be said about the final impact of the stories on the perception of the people. Did people learn something from the debate? And if so, what did they learn? The only concrete indication that shows that people were learning is the fact that during the debates people changed their opinions openly. For a supra-local conservationist this result may be very meagre. After all, the final goal is not just talking but especially learning. The question of whether people have become more aware of the importance of conservation during the sessions, for example, remains unanswered. However, it should again be noted that the main purpose of the stories was to stimulate active thinking through a debate. With respect to this purpose some results have been achieved. The mere fact that people were involved in a debate that touched on different opinions and the arguments, could in itself contribute to a wider field of vision and stimulate people to explore different possibilities. The detailed role of such debates for the final process of mutual learning and understanding with respect to a specific content still remains undefined, at least for this short-term experiment. I will come back to this in the conclusions in chapter 10.

9.6 How to facilitate communication through stories

After having analysed the three stories in different experimental situations this section contains a suggested protocol for using stories for intercultural communication.

It can be concluded that storytelling is extremely useful for what can be called ‘setting the agenda’ since stories have a great entertainment value and can thus introduce themes in a light and attractive context. Moreover, the formula of putting a dilemma at the end is extremely efficient for starting up a debate although the nature and intensity of the debate is variable. From the experiments we may extract three main factors that determine the debate: storyteller, story and audience. Figure 9.3 shows the relationship between these factors and summarises some of the main properties of each factor that contributes to the improvement of a debate.

As can be concluded from the former sections, the experiments have proven the usefulness of dilemma tales for initiating a debate. Precisely because the form of a dilemma tale can help to stimulate the debating process in general, irrespective of the content, they can be put into service for any kind of subject you want to talk about. It could be used for themes related to nature conservation as has been done in this research, but it could also be used, for example, for health education or to discuss ethical, social or political issues. Since the form of the communication instrument is convenient for all stakeholders, it gives the opportunity for all stakeholders to participate in the debate.

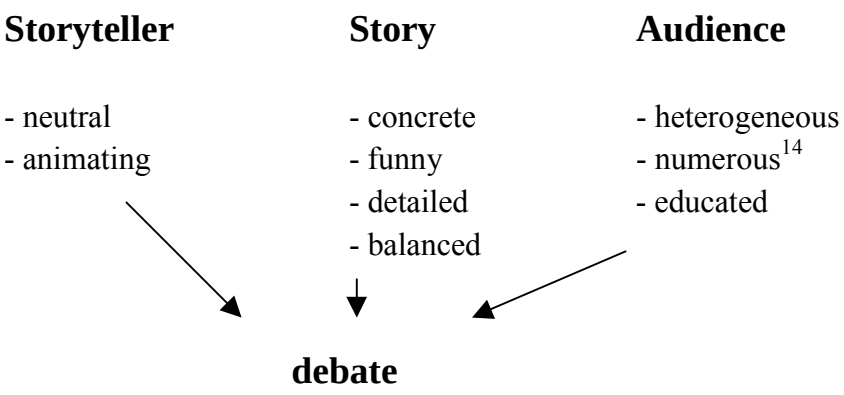


Figure 9.3: Factors positively influencing the debate

If we want to use dilemma tales for initiating a debate on a chosen theme, the question is, of course, how to construct a new story? To answer this question, let me go back to the three conceptual levels in narratology (section 2.4.): fabula, story and text. The construction of any new story for our purpose should always start with the highest level. In order to construct the fabula one should define the theme to be discussed. Once the theme has been made concrete and outlined in an example, the story can be created. Finally, the factual text can be made to give form to the story.
The proposed procedure for making a story and which has been followed in this research, is:

1 Define the theme you want to discuss (e.g. nature conservation, health education etc.),
2 Define a concrete question relating to this theme (e.g. one of the Milton questions),
3 Select an example (e.g. the (sustainable) hunting of wildlife),
4 Define the different opinions with respect to this theme, in other words: the different answers to the question given form in the different possibilities in the example (e.g. using resources abundantly versus sustainable limited use),
5 Make an inventory of as many pros and contras for each opinion as possible,
6 Construct a fabula by using the example,
7 Choose a story character for each opinion (e.g. the lion and the dog),
8 Construct the story and, as far as needed, the story text,
9 Train a storyteller/ animator (examining misunderstanding and exploring the different potential reactions to the dilemma),

[14] In fact this property probably has an optimum. More people means more debate but too many may also restrict the debate. Moreover, it can be hypothesised that the optimum size of the audience depends on the heterogeneity of the group. The more heterogeneous the less people you need for a good debate.

10 Try out,
11 Rephrase the story[15].

Once the story has been constructed and told to an audience, the debate needs to be carefully led. In order to have a good debate, a balanced tension between the different parties in the dilemma should be created and maintained. This tension already needs to be constructed while telling the story. This is possible since we have concluded in section 2.4 that telling a story always implies manipulation. The storyteller should thus be conscious of the fact that in spite of his task not to influence the opinion of the audience, he needs to be well-versed in the art of manipulation. The storyteller can indeed create the tension in the debate by manipulation. As we have learned from narratology (see section 2.4), the most interesting layer for manipulation is the story-layer. Manipulating the story in order to make it as balanced as possible could be done by several techniques, of which the most important is focalisation. Focalisation is important for two reasons. First, it is the main instrument to create a balance between different alternatives in the dilemma. For example, the room given to the lion and the dog (story 1) may determine the outcome of the debate. Second, it is important for the extent to which people enter into the skin of a party (such as the ants in story 2) to avoid inappropiate discussion, *i.e.* focussed on other issues than the intended ones.

On the story-level, manipulation especially takes place by choosing the story characters. Here we have two possibilities. Either, the dilemma is presented from an outsider's point of view (story 1 and 3). In this case the story characters need to be as neutral as possible. The judge in story 1 is an extreme example of the need to be such a neutral judge. If this judge is not neutral many unforeseen causes may influence the final outcome of the dilemma. For the same reason, it is better to choose a neutral child in story 3 instead of the known character Haman.

If the dilemma regards the interest of a whole group (story 2), it is important to emphasise the position of this group. In this case the specific properties of story characters may help, such as the smallness of the ants compared to the boy.

After telling a story the storyteller becomes an animator of the debate. Theoretically, the storyteller and the animator can be two different persons, or there can be more animators present in one debate although it seems to be more natural to use the same person. The main tasks of the animator is to keep the debate focussed and to elicit as many as arguments as possible. As we have seen from the examples this could be done only when the storyteller also know all meta-levels of the story.

In the experiments described I have worked with an interpreter from the same ethnic background as the audience group. This was done in order to reduce the influence of this factor in comparing the three stories. In practice, however, the storyteller could well be a

[15] It should be noted that this last step hardly has been done in this study because I wanted to have the text as constant as possible for reasons of comparison between the villages.

supra-local such as an employee from an environmental organisation.[16] This could be illustrated by case 4 in which I myself acted as the storyteller/ animator. Using the techniques described above provide an excellent opportunity for putting oneself in a neutral position, being allowed to switch one's opinion within the context of the story. In story 1, for example, I could easily support the lion in a certain phase of the debate, because everything was interpreted as being part of the story. This makes such stories extremely useful for intercultural communication on subjects that are *a priori* culturally biased, such as environmental conservation.

[16] He should of course satisfy the minimum conditions such as mastering the language and not having a negative personal relationship with the audience group.

10 Conclusions

In this final chapter I will summarise the findings of this thesis by going back to the research questions asked in Chapter 1. The main research question was: *how may stories and storytelling help to improve an intercultural dialogue on environmental conservation?*

Besides the scientific results of this study, *i.e.* the acquired knowledge on stories and storytelling in different regions in Cameroon as well as the analysis of some experiments with newly composed stories, I will also pay attention to the practical implications of these results.

The first set of questions, mentioned in section 1.2.3 concerned the characteristics of the local storytelling universes in two research regions in Cameroon, and the comparison with supra-local stories about nature conservation.

As we have seen, storytelling is still a very lively tradition in Cameroon. Stories occur in a rich and dynamic variety, and storytelling is accepted and practised by all locals. In spite of the large distance between the two research areas; the Far North and Central Province appeared to have many similarities, in terms of setting, format and content of the stories. With respect to the setting, most storytelling sessions took place at night. The sessions were open so the audience could walk in and out. Everyone was allowed to tell stories and as a result, storytellers varied a lot in age and gender. With respect to format, different story formats and types occurred, though the most relevant locally made distinction was between fictional stories, such as fables and fairy tales, and historical stories that claim to deal with non-fictional events in the past.

Focussing on the link between local stories and the environment we have observed that many local stories contain environmental elements such as animals, trees, mountains, rivers or forests. However, when looking at the potential value of local stories for education or stimulation of environmental awareness, we have seen that there are no local stories with a direct environmental message or moral such as those that we find in supra-local narratives told as non-fiction by conservationists and environmental NGOs. In spite of the fact that local stories are often full of moral lessons, these lessons generally refer to social issues such as respect for elders or the duty to be honest. Moreover, local stories and supra-local stories fundamentally differ with respect to some underlying assumptions about the perception of the environment and the human-nature relationship. In some cases, environmental problems such as drought or the disappearance of animal species are the subject of the local story, but the causal link with human activities is different from the causality found in supra-local stories. Whereas many supra-local stories lay a direct link between unsustainable human activities and the degradation of the environment, in local stories the relation between human action and environmental impact is rather indirect. In most local stories, the environment is quite

able to take care of itself, and a degrading environment is often perceived as a punishment or revenge for human social misbehaviour rather than a suffering from environmental misbehaviour. This may in some cases also lead to the increase of animals. One example is from Mindif in the Far North province where, after the death of a chief, the social morals were forgotten. As a result, a special species of bird (perceived as friends of the chief) disappeared, and misfortune began to afflict the village. At the same time, the elephant population that annually invades the village and destroys the crops increased.

In spite of the absence of environmental messages, stories do provide a lot of information on the local perception of the environment. This concerns in the first place a level of concrete information, referring to factual knowledge of the environment. This knowledge can agree, complement or contest the knowledge found in supra-local narratives. To give an example of the latter, in Central Province stories are telling us about an increasing forest cover which is in accordance with empirical data but quite different from the current supra-local ideas about deforestation of the same region (proclaimed by e.g. WWF-Cameroon). Secondly, stories reveal underlying assumptions about nature and the relationships between people and nature that are of great importance for a true dialogue on nature conservation (Milton, 1996). These concern, for instance, perceptions of place and time, and the issue of whether nature is seen as vulnerable or powerful. With respect to place and time we may say that supra-local stories are on the whole oriented on a future, long term and global scale whereas local stories mainly deal with a short timescale and local environments. Contrary to supra-local stories, the local stories almost universally depict nature as something powerful that can take care of itself and better be respected or even feared. A tiny undercurrent theme of nature as vulnerable, arousing emotions of compassion intermingle with this mainstream, e.g. in one story in which a farmer takes care of a baby elephant for reasons of compassion and is rewarded later by the mother. The presence of such minority themes may be seen as a cultural repository for change. In this respect it may be noted that all stories elicited (and told) by me are what may be called ‘public stories’; the common property of all members of the society. This contrasts with the ‘secret’ stories, told among initiated men only, such as the tradition of the *Mvet* in Cameroon. These stories tend to be much more philosophical and ethically open than the public ones. Although these stories are interesting in terms of a repository for change, such stories can of course not be used for public debate.

The second set of research questions deals with the potential use of storytelling for improving intercultural communication. For this, I rested on the entertainment-education principles which imply that stories should be entertaining and educational. Entertainment has proven to be a basic characteristic of local storytelling. The entertainment intensity can be easily improved by using specific styles, puns, forms of narration etc. The educational aspect, on the other hand, is the more delicate issue here.

Using storytelling as a tool for directly teaching the supra-local environmental message to local people is highly disputable. As we saw, there is little similarity in themes and messages between local and supra-local stories as far as the environment is concerned. Therefore, there is no 'ultimate story' that simply tells the whole truth. Consequently, using storytelling to get the environmental message across is only a nicely entertaining and compelling style of one-way, top-down communication.

Therefore, the potential value of storytelling as a tool for supra-locals in the intercultural dialogue should be seen as stories that may be used as a tool for initiating a debate that stimulates active thinking among local people on problems such as those postulated by environmentalists.

It should be noted that not every type of story is automatically useful for generating such a debate. On the contrary, many local stories conclude with a moral and do not stimulate any debate at all. Therefore, we have to focus on a specific group of stories that stimulate this active thinking, such as stories of the cycle of the rebellious character of 'Kulu the turtle' in Central Province or dilemma tales (*i.e.* stories that end with a question to the audience) found in both provinces.

Dilemma tales appear to be most suitable. First, because they occur in both research regions and may thus be a generally recognisable type of story. Second, because these stories are characterised by only a specific format; the content of the story can be changed and adapted according to the issues one wants to talk about. How and to what extent are dilemma stories helpful for improving an intercultural dialogue on environmental conservation? For answering this question I go back to the results of thirteen experiments that were done in the field with three stories composed by myself. For the composition of these stories I was inspired by local stories and story themes. The stories aimed to discuss some of the underlying assumptions that were considered to be important for the dialogue. This way, the first story on the conflict between the dog and the lion about the secret of hunting was designed to elicit discussion on the vulnerability of nature and the extinction of species. The second story about the little boy was designed to elicit discussion on the scale of place (local-global), the issue of whether one should think about the future and the need for mutual relationships. The third story about the boy with his destructive mood was designed to discuss the utilitarian and intrinsic value of species. The stories were told in nine villages in the Far North and four villages in the Central Province, usually with mixed informal audiences.

The outcome of these experiments may be divided in strictly communicative elements such as the intensity of the debates, and the content of what has been said. As for the communicative elements we may conclude that:

- People of different age, gender and status got involved in the same discussion on an equal basis,

- People exchanged ideas in an active way instead of only listening to one idea or vision,
- People were able to change their opinions during the debate which implies a learning process,
- People enjoyed the debate and as a result they remembered the content very well.

With respect to the outcome in terms of substance we may conclude that in almost all sessions the different sides of the dilemma were advocated by several people by giving arguments that were relevant for the themes that were initially meant to discuss. There seemed to be no *a priori* bias in the debate because of my presence or the presence of a supra-local storyteller. In some cases, other interesting issues were discussed, such as the debate about the possibility of animal extinction in the second story. Although some irrelevant side-discussions occurred too, these could easily be stopped by inventing some new elements in the story. The discussion about whether one should give the girl to the lion in story 1, for example, could be avoided by saying that she had already grown old. The quality of the debate in terms of argumentation was especially high in the cases in which the audience was heterogeneous or had a high level of education. Probably the most interesting result of the debates is that apart from argumentation to defend one of the parties in the dilemma, in several villages people came up with concrete alternatives to solve the problem. This may show that debating is very fruitful not only for forming an opinion but also for the creative process of inventing solutions.

Up till this point I have described the results of my study from the distanced point of view of empirical science. Along the way, however, we have encountered results that may also be described as 'good' in a normative sense. Active thinking, for instance, has been described by Towa (1979) as one of the most basic things that Africa needs in order to overcome its semi-perennial state of crisis. From the point of the present conclusions onwards, I will now take that more normative and action-oriented look at my results. What are the benefits of storytelling, if carried out in the way described here, what are the possible risks, and how may this possible function of storytelling be enhanced?
The answers to these questions are relatively straightforward. First I deal with the issue of the benefits of storytelling .

Storytelling, carried out as in the present study, has a number of unique advantages for both villagers and supra-local outsiders who enter the village scene with some development purpose.

1 Storytelling is entertaining and gives both villagers and outsiders the opportunity to show sides of being human that do not easily find their way in more discursive interactions, such as with laugther, creativity, etc. Irrespective of story content this will

improve the 'embeddedness' (Ostrom, 1990) of any project. This process is egalitarian; people of high authority (e.g. the outsider or the village chief) will not show up as necessarily more creative than, for instance, youngsters or women.

2 If a story is followed up by an intercultural debate, the same holds for the logic and content of the arguments. From a debate on any subject, both the villagers and the outsider learn from each other in ways that are much broader than the specific issues (such as nature protection or health education) addressed by the project.

3 The stimulus of multi-actor active thinking is always positive as such, irrespective of direct results.

With respect to the substantive issues brought in by the supra-local outsider - the underlying assumptions of which should be the subject matter of stories composed and told by the outsider-; a type of mutual learning and teaching is brought about by storytelling that is of high validity and efficiency:

4 The insights gathered by the outsider are valid because in stories and story-based debate, people speak their mind free from political and social correctness. Moreover, the voices of non-authoritive people are clearly heard.

5 By telling his own story the outsider may learn efficiently, because contrary to only listening to local stories, the composed stories are focussed on the outsiders primary issues.

6 The outsider's vision does not carry any special weight in the story-based debate. Yet, it does not take special skills to ensure that this vision is at least taken up and discussed along with the others.

7 Through a dilemma story, people enter into a solution-oriented mood, discussing alternatives on various levels of moral reflection. This may well inform the outsider of the types of solutions that may count on a good basis in the community, and furthermore, solutions may crop up that no-one has thought of yet.

Having discussed the benefits of storytelling, let me now come to the potential risks. To achieve a balanced situation it is of course important that this method is not used incidentally. If one uses this method as proposed in this study what may go wrong, and if things go wrong what is the potential harm it may do? It should be noted first that a risk is situated in that storytelling as it stands now is only a very young method that may not yet be applied on a routine basis. If, as sometimes happens, the World Bank should take over and storytelling would spread into a sudden massive use by practitioners with only superficial understanding, who knows what may go wrong.

This being said, I will make some remarks on the method's applicability. By whom could it be used, how and under which conditions?

It should be recognised first that before I dared to do any experiments with storytelling in the field, I had spent a long period of investigation on local stories. Does this mean that implementing this method in another area would demand the same lengthy process of preparation? If so, it would be rather useless as a general tool; we cannot demand that each NGO does years of fieldwork on stories before applying the storytelling method. In that case it would obviously miss its goal.

On the other hand, this study has shown that people do have a high flexibility of acceptance and understanding of stories. The two fieldwork regions were easily comparable in spite of the 1200 km distance. Based on this, as well as what has been written in the literature about the universality of stories (e.g. Schipper, 1990b; Campbell, 1988; Paulme, 1976), I would suggest that my three stories could be used as a basis of inspiration for other West African countries as well, without claiming, of course, that others could not make better ones. Making some alterations in the stories and story characters could suffice to use stories of one region in other regions as well. Although the experiments discussed in chapter 9 were not numerous and systematic enough to be translated into a formal protocol for the storytelling method, I think some general principles may be extracted and applied to other situations. Local NGOs, in particular, may be suitable for using this method since they usually have a lot of knowledge about the culture they are working with including the stories that occur. Whereas for me as an outsider it was necessary to first study the local stories, I noted that when I told my three example stories to Cameroonian employees of WWF-Cameroon, the stories were instantly recognisable to them. They suggested that such stories could be used, for instance, during village meetings, for radio programmes or at schools.

As for the adaptation or composition of the stories themselves, use can be made of the principles set forth in chapter 9, such as focussing on one of the assumptions of underlying differences between local and supra-local visions. Related to this, story themes (*i.e.* the subject of the debate) should be kept as simple as possible in order to avoid ambiguous discussions. For a well-composed story to really do its work for active thinking and mutual learning, the person of the storyteller is of utmost importance, especially because he is also the facilitator of the story-based discussion. The experiments showed that it is quite acceptable if the facilitator switches arguments during the debate, because people know that he does so to keep the debate going. This, and not being spokesman for the supra-local visions, is the only appropriate role for the facilitator, and in fact also the only possible one because if the facilitator's role is dropped, the debate will immediately turn from a debate about the story into a debate against the outsider, *i.e.* a debate of which too many have been performed already. The neutral position of the storyteller could be supported by the story itself. This can be done by choosing story characters who are not directly linked to any category of participants in the debate, such as animal characters or fictional persons. Moreover, stories should be structured such that both sides of the dilemma become properly focalised. The facilitator should try to avoid a 'yes-no discussion' and instead go beyond the

dilemma by stimulating people to come up with as many alternatives as possible and to further consider these alternatives during the debate.

In the world as it is today we cannot escape from the process of globalisation which leads to more and more confrontation and interaction between Western and local cultures. We cannot ignore the existing power balances between these cultures. At the same time, however, we have to deal with problems (such as environmental problems) that regard mankind as a whole and this will necessarily involve intercultural encounter. Storytelling as a method for the encounter between local and supra-local visions offers unique advantages over more direct and discursive approaches. Although active debates through storytelling will probably not automatically lead to short term ready-made solutions, they do add to more understanding, better co-operation and a higher chance of finding solutions based on principles of equity. It may confront local people with new ideas and at the same time it may stimulate conservationists to critically reflect their own narratives. For this reason, the method could very well take its particular place in the already existing range of methods for research and communication.

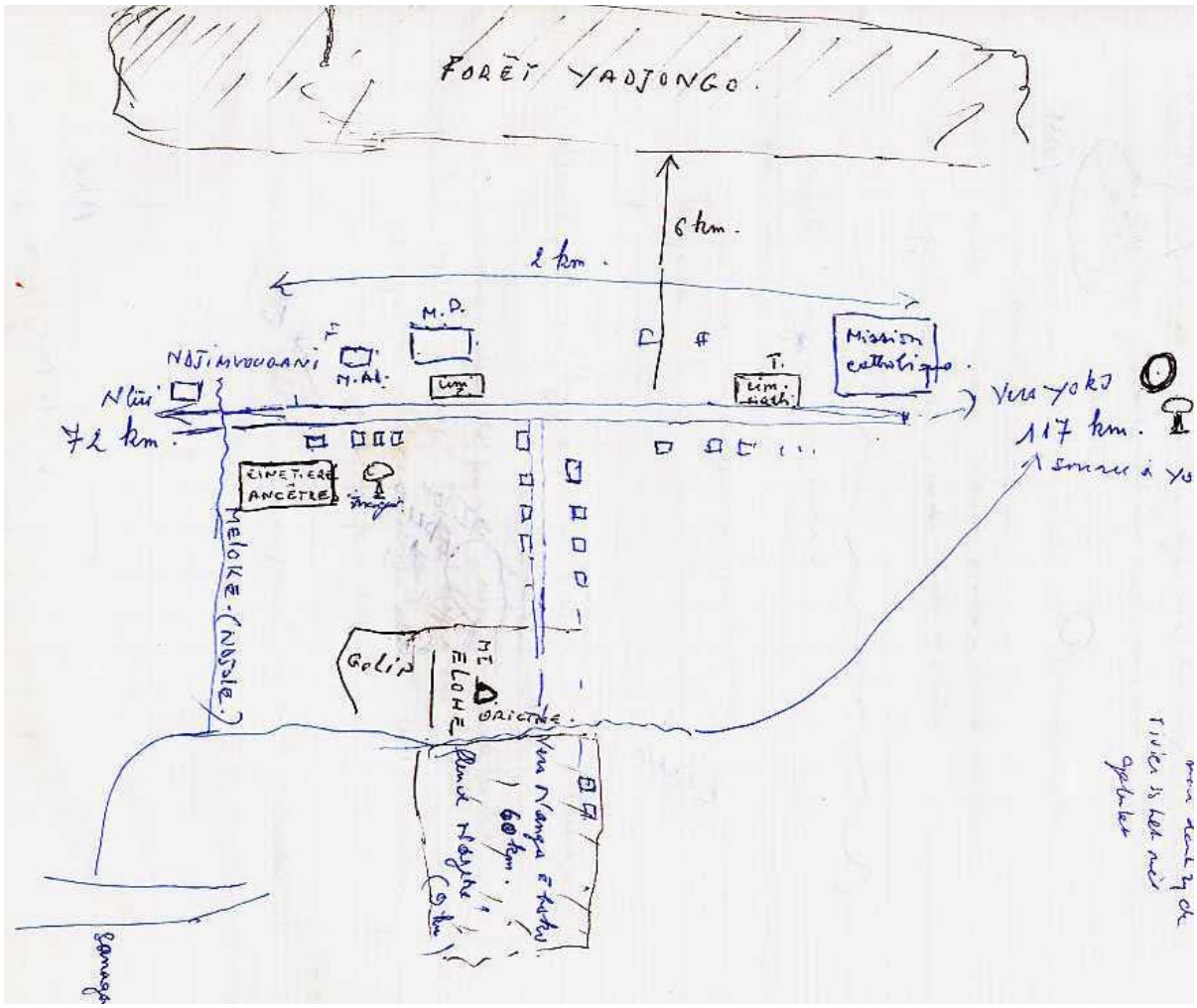
Takalamoulous Takande !

Annex 1: list of animals in and around Waza National Park

(as available at the entry of the park)

Herbivores		
Cob de Buffon	*Kobus kob*	Kob
Redunca	*Redunca redunca*	Bohor reedbuck
Damalisque	*Damaliscus lunatus korrigum*	Topi
Hippotrague	*Hippotragus equinus*	Roan antelope
Gazelle à front roux	*Gazella rufifrons*	Red-fronted gazelle
Céphalophe de Grimm	*Sylvicapra grimmia*	Grimm's duiker
Elephant d'Afrique	*Loxodonta Africana*	African elephant
Girafe	*Giraffa camelopardialis*	Giraffe
Lievre à oreilles de lapin	*Lepus crawshayi*	Crawshay's hare
Carnivores		
Lion	*Panthera leo*	Lion
Caracal	*Felis caracal*	Caracal
Chat sauvage	*Felis lybica*	Wild cat
Serval	*Felis serval*	Serval
Hyène tachetée	*Crocuta crocuta*	Spotted hyena
Hyène rayée	*Hyaena hyaena*	Striped hyena
Chacal commun	*Canis aureus*	Common jackal
Chacal à flancs rayés	*Canis adustus*	Side-striped jackal
Renard pâle	*Vulpes pallida*	Sand fox
Autres		
Phacochère	*Phacochoerus africanus*	Warthog
Daman de rocher	*Procavia johnstoni*	Rock hyrax
Oryctérope	*Orycteropus afer*	Aardvark
Genette commune	*Genetta genetta*	Common genet
Mangouste à queue blanche	*Ichneumia albicauda*	White tailed mongoose
Mangue rayée	*Mungos mungo*	Banded mongoose
Mangouste ichneumon	*Herpestes ichneumon*	Egyptian mongoose
Mangouste rouge	*Herpestes sanguineus*	Slender mongoose
Civette	*Viverra civetta*	Civet
Ratel	*Mellivora capensis*	Ratel
Babouin doguera	*Papio anubis*	Anubis baboon
Singe vert	*Cercopithecus aethiops*	Green monkey
Patas	*Erythrocebus patas*	Patas
Galago du Sénégal	*Galago senegalensis*	Senegal galago
Ecureuil fouisseur	*Xerus erythropus*	Striped ground squirrel
Hérisson à ventre blanc	*Erinaceus albiventris*	Four-toed hedgehog
Porc-épic d'Afrique du Nord	*Hystrix cristata*	Crested porcupine

Annex 2: Map of Ndjolé
(as drawn by the villagers).



Annex 3a: storytellers in the Far North Province

storyteller	village	age	sex	ethnic group
Adama	Makabai	35	f	Peul
Adamou Bouba	Guividig	45	f	Mousgoum
Aisatou Dounja	Pette	25	f	Peul
Aissatou Hamadou	Pette	16	f	Peul
Aissatou Tammata	Manga	30	f	Peul
Amina Djerma	Mokio	17	f	Mada
Aminatou Dona	Fadare	70	f	Peul
Aminatou Joesoef	Pette	15	f	Peul
Animatou	Makabai	75	f	Peul
Asta Djam	Fadare	24	f	Peul
Astadjam	Makabai	85	f	Peul
Basa Mada	Tokombere	45	f	Mada
Darga Djinki	Mindif	54	f	Peul
Dide Chardi	Mindif	80	f	Guiziga
Didja Adamou	Niwadji	12	f	Arab choa
Didja Adji	Mindif	43	f	Giziga
Djamila Arabo	Kalfou	20	f	Peul
Djekata Patu	Mindif	80	f	Peul
Djenabou Hamadou	Kalfou	27	f	Peul
Djitatou Oumarou	Pette	40	f	Peul
Doudjhou Amardjouma	Mindif	40	f	Giziga
Doudou Hamantsjuma	Mindif	30	f	Peul
Dudu Watkali	Guividig	50	f	Mousgoum
Duri Abalei	Guividig	21	f	Mousgoum
Fadimatou Nassourou	Kalfou	45	f	Peul
Fanta Bogo	Guividig	50	f	Mousgoum
Habiba Abanakel	Magaldou	66	f	Peul
Hauwa Umaru	Guividig	25	f	Mousgoum
Hawa	Dargala	30	f	Peul
Huri Kamsouloum	Pette	82	f	Peul
Kelou Adam	Zina	30	f	Kotoko
Mahi tenga	Fadare	14	f	Tupuri
Mairamou	Dargala	18	f	Peul
Maman Mataba	Pette	35	f	Peul
Mariam Bashir	Niwadji	12	f	Arab choa

Oumi Madeva	Zina	50	f	Kotoko
Pauline	Makabai	40	f	Baya
Raibiatou	Dargala	21	f	Peul
Valama Dnjida	Mindif	23	f	Peul
Yinyang Dudu	Fadare	28	f	Tupuri
Aba Ali	Fadare	30	m	Peul
Abba Kura	Mindif	60	m	Bornoi
Abba Malloum	Fadare	27	m	Bornoi
Abba Nabara	Guividig	27	m	Mousgoum
Abdoulai Bouba	Guividig	13	m	Mousgoum
Adam	Zina	16	m	Kotoko
Agourda Azougho	Guividig	40	m	Mousgoum
Alkellou Mahamd	Niwadji	20	m	Arab choa
Amadou Hampateba	Mindif	40	m	Peul
Amadou Koni	Pette	15	m	Bornoi
Amadou Lawal	Fadare	54	m	Peul
Bame Hamed	Niwadji	35	m	Arab choa
Bouba Kari Bashir	Niwadji	13	m	Arab choa
Bouba Alioum	Mindif	70	m	Peul
Bouba Hamadou	Fadare	30	m	Peul
Bouba Isan	Zina	65	m	Peul
Bouba Kari	Fadare	21	m	Peul
Bouba Saidou	Fadare	16	m	Peul
Boundi Maidougou	Mindif	85	m	Peul
Cascala	Zina	60	m	Kotoko
Dairou Alias Abba	Manga	70	m	Peul
Ferna Etienne	Fadare	17	m	Peul
Gatsji Tuderko	Pette	60	m	Molgo
Hamadou Abdou	Pette	15	m	Peul
Hamadou Deirou	Pette	23	m	Peul
Hamadou Kordum	Magaldou	24	m	Peul
Hamadou Ousmana	Pette	36	m	Peul
Haman Balda	Pette	70	m	Peul
Hassoumi	Makabai	83	m	Peul
Isoef Abirki	Zina	56	m	Mousgoum
Kamuko Bello	Fadare	17	m	Kera
Kekamla Madandi	Fadare	47	m	Tupuri
Mahamoudou Umar	Guividig	35	m	Mousgoum
Mai abba Kamsulum	Pette	70	m	Peul

Mal Bouba	Dargala	80	m	Peul
Mal Siddi	Makabai	70	m	Peul
Malbukar Tourboun	Mindif	85	m	Bornoi, Marab
Mamad Hamsa	Zina	10	m	Kotoko
Masa Bouba Samiel	Guividig	17	m	Mousgoum
Matta Adamou	Guividig	13	m	Bornoi
Mbarga Damsala	Fadare	26	m	Tupuri
Mohamad Younous	Niwadji	48	m	Arab choa
Moussa Amadou	Mindif	15	m	Peul
Moussa Aoule	Guividig	20	m	Peul
Moussa Boukar	Zina	42	m	Kotoko
Moussa Pette	Pette	78	m	Peul
Najeru Isa	Fadare	70	m	Peul
Noukouri Whabou	Zina	67	m	Kotoko
Oumahanie Oubbo	Makabai	80	m	Peul
Ousmanou	Pette	24	m	Peul
Sado haman Balda	Pette	70	m	Peul
Sali Ibrahim	Zina	20	m	Kotoko
Sali Sain	Pette	56	m	Peul
Souleman Ndango	Zina	25	m	Mousgoum
Taksala Perandi	Fadare	37	m	Tupuri
Wahabu Made	Zina	60	m	Kotoko
Wilban Belo	Fadare	25	m	Peul
Yaouba Hamadou	Kalfou	19	m	Peul
Yinyang Albert	Fadare	40	m	Tupuri

Annex 3b: storytellers in Central Province

storyteller	village	age	sex	ethnic group
Adjidja Dimouin	Nguila	60	f	Babouti
Ambassa Henriette	Ndjole	38	f	Baveck
Annette mapire	Nguila	27	f	Babouti
Bela	Ndjole	30	f	Baveck
Edith Yatoulo	Ndjole	20	f	Baveck
Jeanette	Ndjole	39	f	Baveck
Malougi Marie Clarisse	Ndjole	14	f	Baveck
Malugi Marie	Ndjole	13	f	Baveck
Maria Roger	Nguila	55	f	Babouti
Marie Madeleine	Yaounde	40	f	Baveck
Mballa Odile	Ndjole	12	f	Baveck
nammo si	Nguila	70	f	Baveck
Noumana Augustine	Ndjole	60	f	Baveck
Yamvoutou Maria	Nguila	48	f	Babouti
Akoma Jean Foster	Ndjole	25	m	Baveck
Ambara Martin	Yaounde	29	m	Baveck
Ambara Martin	Ndjole	43	m	Baveck
Ambare Thomas	Ndjole	56	m	Baveck
Armand Ngui	Nguila	29	m	Babouti
Arno	Nguila	16	m	Babouti
Asoke martin	Nguila	44	m	Ndounga
Baba Lucien	Yambetta	75	m	Bassa
Besala Benoit	Ndjole	30	m	Baveck
Besala Ludovick	Ndjole	14	m	Baveck
Bessala Benoit	Ndjole	60	m	Yangaveck
chief	Nguila	60	m	Babouti
chief	Ndjole	50	m	Baveck
danasjen	Nguila	28	m	Babouti
Didier	Nguila	25	m	Babouti
Dieu donné	Ndjole	60	m	Baveck
Ebori Jean Claude	Ndjole	50	m	Baveck
Elvis	Nguila	26	m	Babouti
Essom Ambara Edouard	Ndjole	25	m	Baveck
Gomtse Choaibou	Nguila	33	m	Babouti
grand martin	Ndjole	60	m	Baveck
Issa Mossi Saidou	Nguila	56	m	Babouti

Jean Emare	Ndjole	30	m	Baveck
Legbo Joseph	Nguila	33	m	Babouti
Marcien Towa	Yaounde	60	m	Bafia
Mbgavou Nicolas	Essandja	32	m	Baveck
Mbong Ernest	Ndjole	47	m	Baveck
Minpeh Pascal Francois	Ndjole	34	m	Betamba
Moise Indom	Essandja	40	m	Yangaveck
Mondja Roger	Nguila	28	m	Babouti
Ndake Pierre	Yaounde	72	m	Baveck
Ndjock Nkongo Christian	Ndjole	17	m	Baveck
Ngarran Thomas	Ndjole	60	m	Baveck
Nlem Gilbert	Essandja	60	m	Baveck
Ondoua Jean Didier	Ndjole	27	m	Nanga
Simbe Adalbert	Ndjole	18	m	Baveck
Sinda Soule	Nguila	65	m	Babouti
Sobe Armel	Nguila	16	m	Babouti
Tina Messe Francois	Ndjole	24	m	Baveck
Venei mamadou	Nguila	36	m	Babouti
Visoe Martin	Nguila	35	m	Babouti
Vouger Simon	Ndjole	57	m	Baveck

Annex 4: tree species mentioned in stories in the Far North

Scientific name	Fulfuldé name
Acacia dudgeoni	patuki
Acacia ataxacontha	ngoradie
Acacia nilotica	sakanahi
Acacia senegal	delbi
Acacia seyal	bulbé
Acacia tortilis	beluki
Andropogon gaibus	araraho
Anogeissus leiocarpus	kodjoli
Balanites aegyptiaca	tané
Caparis tomentosa	djadjidji
Cassia spp.	tasbao
Celtis integrifolia	gangki
Combretum aculatum	laoumi
Combretum glatinosum	geleodi
Crateva adansonii	samananki
Diospyros mespiliformis	nelbi
Echinochloa stagina	nandere
Ficus platiphylla	dundehi
Guiera senegalensis	gelihuki
Maerua angolensis	buguhi
Mitcagyna inermis	koli
Pennisetum pedisilatum	uluko
Piliostigma reticulatum	barkei
Sclerocarya birrea	eri
Sterculia setigera	boburi
Tamarinda indica	diami
Zygiphus abyssinica	djabé

Annex 5: Three examples of the debates

<30 means younger than 30.

F means female

Example 1: debates in Essandja

Débat 1 : the lion and the dog

<30 : je donne le tort au chien parce que pendant toute la période qu'ils ont chassé chez le lion le chien n'a rien dit mais dès qu'on propose d'aller faire la chasse chez lui il commence à faire le malin

ANIMATEUR: c'est bien de donner le tort au chien mais imaginez que le chien a raison. Quand on sait que le chien pense à l'avenir des enfants de deux !

<30 : au moment où le chien a commencé la chasse pourquoi il n'y a pas avisé le lion avant ? C'est seulement au moment où le lion propose d'aller chez lui. Je trouve ça suspect.

ANIMATEUR: ce n'est pas suspect, ils sont des amis

<30 : c'est mon point de vue, le chien n'est pas sérieux

>30 : cette histoire là, si on laisse les animaux. Je bois l'eau avec la même cuillère que toi et après je dis que ma cuillère est percée en prétendent les enfants et tout et tout…., ce n'est pas normal. Je ne comprends pas qu'après exterminer, le chien refuse de lui laisser chasser dans son territoire.

ANIMATEUR: mais le chien dit vrai que les animaux chez lui sont finis

>30 : je donne tort au chien dans cette affaire. Il y a un sage et un fou. Si le sage a l'assiette de l'huile il fera la même chose. On mange d'abord chez le fou et après le sage garde son plat. C'est malin.

ANIMATEUR: disons qu'il y a deux parties de la forêt. La partie du chien est totalement fini et en pensant à l'avenir le chien a demandé d'arrêter la chasse

<30 : pourquoi le chien n'a pas dit : aujourd'hui on chasse dix, demain vingt, d'une manière réduite alors. Il finit de chasser chez le lion et refuse de chasser chez lui. Le chien croit jouer le malin.

ANIMATEUR: les femmes n'ont pas encore parlé

>50F : je donne aussi tort au chien

ANIMATEUR: mais imaginez qu'après une expérience le chien se rend conte que c'est fini

>50F : pourquoi le remède fait qu'on chasse seulement chez le lion ? Honnêtement le chien a tort. Tu penses quoi ?

ANIMATEUR: c'est l'avis de tout le monde

>50F : à partir de la promesse du cadeau, le chien a promis le cadeau. Alors arrivé au carrefour le lion a dit : donne le cadeau tout de suite. Le chien a donné le remède comme échange avec la femme. Le chien ne pouvait pas s'amuser si non il devait mourir. Il continue la chasse du côté du lion. Le chien avait peur pour le lion. Il ne pouvait pas lui dire la vérité. Pour cela il n'avait pas encore parlé. Mais il a raison, le chien a raison.

<30 : est-ce que le seul bien que le chien puisse donner au lion c'est de lui donner le remède ?

ANIMATEUR: jusqu'au moment d'échange le lion ne savait pas que c'était le secret

<30 : le chien savait que c'était un remède de la chasse

ANIMATEUR: c'est évident qu'on donne tort au chien ?

>50F : c'est le chien qui a donné le secret et c'est le même chien qui dit qu'il a fini à son côté. Il a réfléchi par rapport à l'avenir des enfants de chien et de lion. Et c'est là où la réflexion commence à devenir difficile. Le chien était plus sage que le lion, il a raison

>30 : d'un côté le chien a raison, d'un autre côté le lion a raison. Pourquoi le chien a donné le remède ? Pourquoi font-ils tellement de chasse ?
ANIMATEUR: ils étaient toujours à deux. Disons que c'est effectivement vrai que le chien a raison que les animaux sont finis.
>30 : pendant ce temps il faisait quand même la chasse chez son ami. Pourquoi le chien n'a jamais dit au lion qu'il y avait un problème?
<30 : honnêtement ce n'est pas le chien qui pouvait dire au lion d'arrêter la chasse. Le lion a pu dire depuis qu'on chasse au côté du lion. Le lion devrait proposer. Ce n'était pas au chien de proposer. En principe, le lion était roi de réserve mais il aussi attendu.
<30 : qui a raison alors ?
<30 : le lion a été très fou de laisser qu'on chasse chez lui longtemps. Pendant des années le chien vient toujours et le lion n'a jamais réfléchi sur ce problème ? C'est le chien qui est sage
>50 : c'est la politique, les mensonges ont commencé depuis
<30 : je donne tort au lion, le chien est sage. Le chien défend son territoire comme une espace de réserve lorsque le lion est entrain de vider son côté. Le chien déclare que les animaux sont finis comme idée de réserve. Même s'il y a encore des animaux c'est une réserve pour protéger les animaux.
<30 : les blancs, quand ils ont bouffé leur bois, est-ce qu'on était avec eux ? Ils ont fini de bouffer. Pendant ce temps on a toujours pris un petit peu. On allait voler un petit peu et eux ils construisent notre pays. Maintenant si leurs arbres sont finis ils viennent chez nous, les noires. Si nous décidons de fermer nos pays que les arbres ne vont plus a l'Europe est-ce qu'on a tort a ce moment là ? Quand ils ont fini, est-ce qu'on était ensemble et même si on était ensemble on n'avait pas la même opinion. C'est alors la même chose. Le chien et le lion mangeaient ensemble. Le chien ne mangeait pas beaucoup quand il chassait chez le lion. Quand le lion demande donc d'aller chez lui et le chien refuse je trouve qu'il a parfaitement raison. Le lion lui donnait un petit morceau après la chasse.
ANIMATEUR: non, ils étaient de bons amis, ils partageaient également, le chien déclare véritablement que les animaux sont finis
<30 : dans ce cas le chien a raison de protéger sa zone.

Débat 2 : the boy and the ants

<30F : si c'était moi, je finis d'abord la poubelle avant de continuer. L'enfant est entrain de les tromper pour que lui il puisse manger tout
ANIMATEUR: tu n'as même pas pitié de l'enfant ?
<30F : est-ce que l'enfant a pitié de fourmi ?
<30 : si le petit avait pitié des fourmis il devrait donner aux fourmis mais il n'a pas fait. Il a jeté seulement. Les fourmis ont eux-mêmes trouvé
<30 : Si moi j'étais une fourmi je remonterais. Si je laisse la poubelle finir et après je n'attrape plus des animaux je vais mourir. Mieux d'être sur les deux possibilités en même temps. S'ils vont sur l'arbre et il n'y a pas des animaux j'aurai quand même ma réserve qui est la poubelle. C'est plus assuré.
>50 : les fourmis doivent remonter parce que les fourmis, avant que l'enfant attrape les animaux ils ont aussi déjà mangé un peu alors. L'enfant n'a pas tout volé. C'est juste après que l'enfant venait récupérer. Donc les fourmis doivent rester en haut au lieu de juste profiter de la poubelle
ANIMATEUR: réfléchissez étant fourmi. Il y a quelqu'un qui vient te dire qu'il faut reprendre le travail
<30F : je donne mon avis, Les fourmis restaient en haut pour chasser sans savoir que le petit habitait à côté et chaque fois le petit enfant vient prendre leur gibier. Alors un jour après l'inquiétude du fait que les gibiers

disparaissent elles découvrent la poubelle. Après la poubelle elles découvrent l'enfant. En principe, les gibiers ne partiennent pas a l'enfant mais aux fourmis. Les fourmis ont le droit de rester à la poubelle.
Applause
<30F : sans la chasse des fourmis la poubelle n'existait même pas. Si j'étais une fourmi je resterai sur l'arbre et comme ça la poubelle reste grande. Si je reste à la poubelle ça va finir et j'aurai faim par la suite. Il faut que les fourmis partent à la chasse pour augmenter la poubelle pour l'avenir. Comme ça il y aura la nourriture et pour l'enfant et pour les fourmis ! .
<30 : quand les fourmis étaient descendues c'était parce qu'il y avait une fourmi qui a découvert ! Ils ont cru et ils ont descendu, C'était aussi une fourmi qui lui raconte l'histoire de l'enfant alors puis qu'on croit toujours en une fourmi moi je prends la décision de ne le pas faire, je reste à la poubelle pour punir l'enfant
<30 : Les fourmis nourrissaient le petit orphelin. Il n'y avait rien. Le petit aussi nourrissait du nouveau les fourmis. Si les fourmis arrêtent à chasser, l'enfant va mourir. En principe si le petit a la nourriture, les fourmis auront aussi la nourriture. Il faut maintenir le cycle, la chaîne.
<30 : donc tu veux quoi ?
<30 : dès que les fourmis ont descendu le petit enfant était malheureux et les fourmis seront aussi malheureuses. Alors il faut que les fourmis remontent pour que les deux soient bien.
ANIMATEUR: Imaginez qu'il y a une parmi vous qui dit qu'il faut reprendre un travail pénible s'il y a plein de nourriture ?
<30 : si les fourmis ne montent pas, il y aura la famine pour tout le monde. A la fin les fourmis seront obligées d'aller à la chasse et elles risquent d'avoir oublié comment chasser
<30 : si c'est moi, je ne partais pas.
<30 : il faut que l'enfant et les fourmis s'entendent parce que si l'enfant ne fait plus sa poubelle les fourmis vont avoir faim et si les fourmis ne chassaient pas l'enfant aura faim. En principe, le petit enfant et les fourmis doivent cohabiter pour continuer leur travail.
Audience: en discussion
<30F : le petit enfant a volé la nourriture, c'est pour cela qu'elles ont commencé à se balader et ainsi elles ont trouvé la poubelle. Elles se sont installées à la poubelle. Après elles ont découvert l'enfant. Moi, je finirais d'abord la poubelle. Si c'est fini, je remonte sur l'arbre. Si je monte maintenant la poubelle peut pourrir
ANIMATEUR: si tu trouves la vie belle est-ce que tu auras encore la force pour monter un jour ?
<30 : je suis d'accord avec la fille parce que les fourmis cherchaient et ils découvraient la poubelle, alors l'enfant n'a jamais eu pitié avec des fourmis. Si non il pouvait donner la viande au lieu de jeter dans la poubelle.
<30 : en principe, les fourmis ont tué par exemple 20 animaux et c'est ça qui a fait que la poubelle est grande. Imaginez qu'elles arrêtent à chasser. La poubelle va finir et est-ce qu'ils vont aussi chasser tous les animaux pour faire la poubelle ?
<30F : les fourmis vont s'adapter
<30F : c'est la même chose qu'avec le travail. Si on ne travail plus la nourriture va aussi finir. Elles doivent remonter et travailler, ça va les donner profit aussi.
<30 : Si on mangeait les animaux, les fourmis n'avaient rien. C'est parce qu'on ne mange pas les intestines qu'on jette et les fourmis profitent. Mais en principe l'enfant n'avait donné rien aux fourmis.
<30F: oui, c'est parce que les fourmis avaient faim qu'elles sont descendues pour trouver la poubelle.
<30 : n'oubliez pas qu'il y a deux éléments. Le petit enfant était un orphelin et grâce aux fourmis il a survécu. Il n'a pas fait du mal aux fourmis avec sa poubelle. Il n'a pas jeté la viande dans l'eau.
<30 : si les fourmis tuent les gibiers, est-ce qu'elles jettent la viande ailleurs ?

Débat 3 : the boy with a destructive mood

<30 : il faut tuer les insectes, ils ne sont pas importants. Les femmes vont chercher le bois en brousse pour préparer avec. Si on réduit le bois en poudre les femmes vont préparer avec quoi ?

ANIMATEUR: même dans le cas que les papillons sont venus pleurer devant le chef ?

<30 : il faut qu'on les maltraite, c'est mieux, quelle est leur importance ? Le bois est plus important.

<30 : le papillon et autres, il ne faut pas les taper. Le papillon devient chenille et on le mange. Il y a une utilité alors il faut le conserver. Il faut taper le bois.

ANIMATEUR: ne regarde pas seulement le papillon

<30 : même le cricket on mange. Si les choses n'étaient pas important l'homme ne mangeait pas. Il faut que l'enfant trouve autre solution.

ANIMATEUR: il faut choisir entre les deux

<30 : dans ce cas, qu'il maltraite le bois

Audience: wèèèèèh

<30 : si le papillon n'était pas important il ne se déplaçait pas pour aller se plaindre chez le chef. Est-ce que le bois se déplace ? C'était les femmes qui se déplacent au lieu du bois. Alors les papillons sont plus importants.

FFF: le bois va disparaître!!

ANIMATEUR: non, on ne détruit pas le bois mais la distance pour trouver devient plus grande

<30 : Qu'on tape le bois et qu'on laisse les insectes tranquilles ?

FFF: et les insectes tu vas les préparer avec quoi ?

<30F : il faut taper le bois parce qu'il y a des moments où il y a beaucoup de crickets. On ramasse les crickets pour manger alors ils sont très importants. Chercher le bois pour préparer n'est pas difficile.

FFF: et ça c'est une femme qui dit ça???

<30 : les insectes sont venus se plaindre chez le chef que l'enfant les maltraite, ensuite les femmes sont venues se plaindre que le bois est en poudre. L'enfant était même comment pour faire tout ça ? Pourquoi son père ne l'a pas éduqué ?

Audience: oh, la doctrine ! Répond à la question seulement !

<30 : je veux qu'on maltraite le papillon parce que si le bois avait la faculté de s'exprimer…. , c'était les femmes au lieu de bois. J'ai pitié avec le bois. Il faut maltraiter les papillons.

<30 : qu'on maltraite les insectes parce que si le bois est loin on va préparer avec quoi ?

<30 : Dieu n'était pas fou de créer toutes choses, toutes choses sont important et utile. L'enfant qui est né vient détruire tout ce que Dieu avait crée. Il faut chercher un moyen pour que l'enfant ne tue plus. Je ne vois pas comment choisir entre les insectes et le bois. Tout est crée par Dieu et pour cela tout est utile.

<30 : mais pour le conte il faut choisir un !

<30 : je ne peux pas, il détruit l'œuvre de Dieu

<30 : je ne suis plus d'accord parce que si les animaux finissent…

ANIMATEUR: il ne s'agit pas d'exterminer mais de maltraiter

<30 : il n'y a pas de choix. Pour trouver un papillon comme remède avec la peau des animaux et ils sont loin on va faire comment ?

<30F : je voudrais mieux chercher le bois loin au lieu de maltraiter les animaux de la brousse !

<30 : non c'est mieux de maltraiter les animaux. Ils vont continuer à accoucher et se multiplier. Mais pour le bois loin, ça va donner des difficultés pour construire ma maison. C'est pénible de couper le bois à Nguila et transporter sur la tête à Essandja. Je n'ai pas de l'argent pour la voiture.

<30 : entre le bois et les animaux je préfère que l'enfant tape les animaux. Si on ne tue pas on peut dire que le bois est plus important que les animaux.

<30 : il fallait détruire le bois. Les gens qui vivent dans la savane ou le bois est plus rare, ils vivent aussi. Alors on peut vivre avec moins de bois.
<30 : labàs il y a de l'Acacia !
<30 : il y a un pays ou il y a seulement des herbes et pourtant les gens vivent, alors où est le problème. Les seules choses qui font vivre labàs sont les animaux de la brousse.
<30 : mais ils préparent avec quoi ?
<30 : avec le reste de bois
<30 : mais c'est la poussière !
<30F : je voudrais mieux trouver le bois loin et garder les animaux de la brousse. Ils sont utiles pour manger.
ANIMATEUR: et les animaux domestiques ?
<30 : puisqu'il ne tue pas, il maltraite seulement, c'est mieux qu'il continue avec les animaux et on garde le bois
Audience: wèèèèh
<30 : j'ai le même avis. Une maison sans bois à côte ce n'est pas une maison. Tu va chauffer le bois avec quoi ?
ANIMATEUR: je ne refuse pas mais le chien nous accompagne à la chasse
<30 : mais moi je tape souvent le chien
ANIMATEUR: si tu brise la pie il ne peut plus marcher
<30F : non le chien va toujours marcher
<30 : il vaut mieux que l'enfant maltraite les animaux du village. Moi, je blesse souvent mon chien et après je l'amène à la chasse
<30F : non c'est mieux qu'on tape le bois et on laisse son petit chien
Plusieurs: oh, le chien c'est quoi ?
<30 : il y a des villages où il n'y a pas de voiture. Pour aller les chevaux sont vraiment importants. Quand on les maltraite comment tu vas être transporté ? Il voudrait mieux maltraiter le bois et conserver les animaux domestiques.
<30 : qu'on laisse les animaux et qu'on détruise le bois, c'est tout
FFF: tu vas manger les animaux avec quoi ? Nous, on refuse de chercher le bois
<30 : je vais bouffer la viande crue!!
<30 : je voudrais mieux détruire le bois. Si on maltraite les animaux, le chien, il ne peut plus aller avec toi. Le chien peut attraper les animaux et tu cherche le bois un peu loin. Tu prépares et tu manges.
<30 : c'est bien beau que le chien attrape les animaux mais je prépare avec quoi ? Je n'ai pas de gaz.
FFF: nous ne sommes pas d'accord de chercher le bois loin
<30 : alors mieux de maltraiter les animaux du village
ANIMATEUR: et entre le bois et les femmes
<30 : battre une femme c'est quoi ? Battre c'est bien pour la dresser, C'est bien de taper une femme
FFF: wèèèèèh

Example 2: debates in Mokolo

Debate 1 : the lion and the dog

<30F : le chien a raison parce que c'est lui qui a le secret. Après donner le secret il a finit tous les animaux de son côté et si le lion aussi finit les animaux de son côté ils seront tous morts de la famine ou quoi, c'est ça
ANIMATEUR: il y a quelqu'un qui supporte le lion ?

<30F : moi aussi je dis que c'est le chien qui a raison. Il a vu l'avenir. Si on continue à dévorer les animaux dans le futur il n'y aura plus rien. Ils vont tous mourir. C'est mieux de rembourser le cadeau. Comme ça dans l'avenir ils peuvent bien vivre ensemble ! Il a bien réfléchi, c'est mieux de lui remettre

ANIMATEUR: il n'y a personne qui supporte le lion ?

<30 : moi, je supporte le lion

ANIMATEUR: pourquoi ?

<30F : on avait d'abord fait un contrat. Moi je te donne la femme si tu me donne le secret. Même si tu me rembourse la femme, la femme est déjà vieille, qu'est-ce que je fais faire avec elle ? Et lorsque, qu'est-ce qui montre que les animaux de son côté sont finis ? Il faut moi aussi laisser capturer les animaux, on a fait un contrat. Commet encore tu possède la femme et tu veux que je te rembourse le secret ?

ANIMATEUR: oui, le chien est aussi un peu égoïste. Il a déjà bien bouffé les animaux chez lui et maintenant il vient dire au lion, qu'il ne peut pas chasser. Ce n'est pas juste ou bon quoi ?

<30 : le lion et le chien ont fait une accorde donc le chien a finit sa part. Le chien est un peu égoïste. Le lion a dit : non, je ne te remets pas. Bon si on prend la femme, le chien a eu beaucoup des enfants, et le secret ne vieillit pas. Si le lion remets le secret, il va faire comment ?

ANIMATEUR: il va peut-être continuer à chasser traditionnellement

<30F : quelque part le lion a aussi raison, c'était un contrat. Le chien voulait être égoïste. Si tu peux ni manger ni avoir la femme, donc ce n'est pas bon. Le lion a aussi raison

ANIMATEUR: c'est vrai, les deux ont raison mais il faut quand même donner la raison a un seul. Tu es le grand chef pour résoudre le problème. On a vu que le lion a raison mais le chien a aussi bien réfléchi. Il a vu quelque chose que le lion n'ait pas encore constaté. Le lion est un peu, il a vu seulement pour lui mais le chien a vécu son expérience. Continuez à réfléchir

<30 : c'est le chien qui est le plus malin parce qu'il a profité

<30 : le lion et le chien sont les mêmes parce que le lion a aussi son secret

<30F : mais il faut résoudre le problème, on ne peut pas rester que c'est pareil

<30 : peut-être le chien a raison

<30F : moi je donne raison au lion. Si le chien arrache le secret, il ne peut pas chasser, il risque de mourir

ANIMATEUR: il peut chasser traditionnellement

<30F : mais il a perdu la femme et en même temps le cadeau, donc ça ne peut pas aller. Il faut qu'il ait son cadeau aussi. Ils ont déjà conclu. Le chien doit garder la parole

ANIMATEUR: oui, mais s'ils vont continuer comme ça ils vont tous mourir

<30F : mais il doit quand même tenir à sa parole. Le chien a bien vu. Si les animaux meurent, ils vont tous mourir. Alors le chien doit être intelligent, mais les deux ont raison

ANIMATEUR: oui, mais il faut résoudre le problème

<30F : okay, si c'était moi le chef : tu dois reprendre mais quand tu vas chasser, il faut aussi donner un part au lion pour qu'il mange aussi. Continuer à donner aussi au lion parce qu'il chasse chez le lion

<30 : non, le chien est avare, il ne veut pas donner sa part. Quand le lion sera à famine, il ne va pas donner

ANIMATEUR: oui, mais le chien n'a pas de choix comme les animaux sont finis chez lui il doit aller au territoire du lion

<30F : on ne sait même pas si les animaux sont finis. Qu'est-ce qu'il prouve ça? Le lion risque de mourir. Le lion a raison de ne pas remettre le cadeau. Je ne suis pas convaincu que les animaux sont finis

ANIMATEUR: mais imagine le cas que le chien a quand même raison. Que c'est vrai que le chien a commit une erreur ! Il voulait seulement donner un conseil comme ils sont de bons amis. Le chien est de bonne volonté. Eviter une catastrophe. Il faut que je dise ça à mon ami lion qui n'a pas pensé à l'avenir. Vous ne pensez pas que le chien a quand même aussi raison ?

<30 : s'il retire le cadeau, il va continuer à chasser comme ça, c'est ça que je ne comprends pas

ANIMATEUR: le chien a son secret naturellement, c'est donné par Dieu mais il a quand même vécu son expérience. Il faut qu'on fasse quelque chose

<30 : bon, de ce côté je dis que le chien a raison parce que si même il retire, le lion peut quand même se débrouiller traditionnellement

ANIMATEUR: oui, mais e n'est pas juste, le lion sera plus pauvre que son ami

<30 : même le lion peut chasser

<30 : bon, moi je dis qu'il peut simplement dire au lion, pas qu'ils chassent abondamment. Qu'ils chassent doucement ! Si on chasse beaucoup ça ne va pas aller. Le chien doit conseiller qu'ils chassent mais ne pas beaucoup, un peu un peu

ANIMATEUR: utiliser le secret dans une façon intelligente alors

<30 : qui a finit sa part d'abord ? C'est le chien, non, et toute la nature va être finie. Ils vont manger aujourd'hui mais demain il n'y a rien donc quand la viande est finie, le chien est obligé d'aller ailleurs

ANIMATEUR: tu donne le tort au chien ? J'ai compris qu'il y a trois camps. Un dit que le lion a raison, que ce n'est pas juste. Un dit que le chien est plus sage parce qu'il pense à l'avenir et Caroline a dit qu'ils s'entendent, que le secret devient quelque chose pour les deux mais dans une façon autrement gérée. On ne va plus chasser une centaine des animaux par jour mais on essaye de limiter la chasse dans une façon intelligente. Qu'est-ce vous en pensez?

<30F : moi, je vois la meilleure façon de bien gérer

ANIMATEUR: qui est d'accord ?

<30 : moi

<30 : c'est difficile

<30F : oui, ils ne vont plus s'entendre

<30F : le chien a donné le secret pour profiter de la femme Il a aussi aidé le lion, n'est ce pas ? Comme il a vu dans l'avenir ! C'est mieux de reprendre et après un temps il peut encore redonner après

<30 : non si le chien arrache son secret, le lion ne peut plus chasser. Le chien est expert et l'autre va un peu mourir. Si le chien arrache le secret l'espèce de lion sera en famine et va mourir. Mieux entre eux il se dise pour chasser un peu et partager les choses parce que si le chien arrache, ils seront des meilleures ennemies donc il faut qu'ils travaillent ensemble

ANIMATEUR: voilà

<30F : le lion avait dit que si on tue le chien il n'aura plus le secret. C'est le chien qui a le secret donc le lion a vu

<30 : le lion comprend qu'il risque de perdre son secret. Le chien a son davantage

<30F : si le chien disait avant c'était mieux. Il devrait conseiller auparavant. Le chien a tort

ANIMATEUR: mais dans l'époque il ne savait pas non plus lui-même. Le chien croyait aussi que c'était infini

<30F : mais le chien devrait d'abord bien réfléchi. Il a tort, il n'a pas bien réfléchi, c'était une promesse entre eux

<30 : mais le chien a désordonné

<30F : le chien a tort, il a trop pris

ANIMATEUR: mais il voulait aussi aider son ami

<30F : il a donné et maintenant remettre, comment ?

<30F : mais il a bien réfléchi, il ne devrait pas faire ça pour chasser et créer le désert

<30 : quel désert ?

<30F : finir les animaux, ils vont rester avec quoi ? Donc, ça va causer une catastrophe

<30 : c’est mauvais pour les espèces, tu ne vois pas les espèces ?
<30F : non, tant que le lion ne voit pas le problème
<30 : le chien n’a pas tenu sa promesse
<30F : même s’il n’y avait pas la femme et il faisait ça par concurrence. S’ils n’étaient pas des amis, le chien devrait sortir son secret et il devrait toujours gagner
<30F : e chien avait déjà promis
<30 : le plus malin c’est le chien
<30F : oui, parce qu’il voulait avoir la femme et il avait déjà sa pensé peut-être de l’arracher après
ANIMATEUR: c’est possible, on ne sait pas
<30F : le lion a laissé la femme parce que le lion avait déjà une femme. Si le lion n’avait pas une femme il n’allait pas donner
ANIMATEUR: oui, mais tu es le chef. Tu ne peux pas savoir la vérité. Peut-être le chien a trompé, peut-être il est de bonne volonté
<30F : moi je dis que le chien n’a pas le droit de retirer
<30 : je dirai qu’il fasse la chasse un peu plus contrôlée ensemble, essayer de comprendre de vivre ensemble. Le chien devrait réfléchir mieux pour donner un autre cadeau au lieu de ce qu’il a donné maintenant et comme ça il peut retirer
<30 : si le chien avait estimé que le lion peut finir tout il n’allait pas donner son secret
ANIMATEUR: mais il ne savait pas et on ne peut plus refaire la passé
<30 : c’est déjà passé, on peut seulement regretter
ANIMATEUR: on ne peut pas remettre la vieille femme, on ne peut pas remettre les animaux dans le territoire du chien, C’est passé. Maintenant il faut éviter dans l’avenir les mêmes erreurs. Le chien était peut-être inquiète, peut-être il a menti seulement
<30F : c’est ça, pour éviter une catastrophe il faut essayer de comprendre, en faisant comme ça on risque de mourir. Il faut enseigner la chasse aussi pas vulgaire, faire la chasse un peu intelligente. Si on ne s’entende pas, ça sera la lute et on risque de tuer un
<30F : oui, le chien a raison de réagir dans cette manière
<30 : je pense comme ils sont des bons amis, il faut qu’ils se décident entre eux. Le chien ne devrait pas chasser du côté du lion. Le chien a raison, il faut chercher un moyen pour laisser les animaux vivre
ANIMATEUR: cela veut dire que les deux ont raison ?
<30 : le chien a raison
ANIMATEUR: pourtant le lion a aussi son droit. Ce n’est pas normal qu’il doit rembourser son cadeau. Peut-être c’est un truc du chien, on ne sait pas. Il faut bien réfléchir
<30 : moi, je donne toujours tort au chien parce que le chien voulait exploiter le lion. Il a reçu la femme en échange avec le lion. Le chien reprends son secret mais la femme est déjà une vieille carcasse.
<30F : le lion avait déjà une femme
<30 : oui c’est normal. Ce n’est pas normal que le chien limite le lion
<30 : mais le lion a aussi accepté
ANIMATEUR: accepté quoi ?
<30 : que le chien vient de son côté !
ANIMATEUR: parce qu’ils étaient des amis, à un moment donné ça a commencé à déranger
<30 : on se met en d’accord maintenant qu’il s’entend entre eux
ANIMATEUR: est-ce que le lion veut ça ?
<30 : si non c’est la compétition, on lute.
ANIMATEUR: oui mais le lion ne peut pas tuer le chien, il va perdre le secret, comment résoudre ?

<30 : le chien a raison, vraiment, le roi lion ne comprend pas
<30 : le lion a aussi raison de sa part mais pour la nature entière le chien ne doit pas être puni, C'est mieux que le chien reste avec le secret et qu'on tue le lion. Le lion doit rembourser le secret
<30 : non, le lion a aussi une génération
<30 plusieurs : il faut qu'ils s'entendent entre eux
<30 : donner la femme
<30 : elle est déjà vieille !
<30 : n'oublie pas qu'ils étaient de bons amis
<30 : le chien a déjà fini sa part, il vient profiter du lion
ANIMATEUR: il n'avait pas de choix
<30 : si le lion laisse la liberté, ils vont aussi tout finir et tous vont mourir après. C'est mieux que le chien reste de son côté et le lion aussi garde son secret
ANIMATEUR: mais le lion va faire la même erreur que le chien
<30 : oui, mais chacun pour soi
ANIMATEUR: et tout le monde meure alors ?
<30 : bon, mais le chien est en erreur, il est chez le lion
ANIMATEUR: il vient aviser aussi son ami. Comment résoudre le problème ?
<30 : le chien doit aussi se limiter. On va encore diviser le terrain en deux, chacun va se débrouiller
<30 : le chien a déjà fini. Maintenant il doit aussi laisser sa part au lion avec son secret
<30F : tout le monde va mourir
<30 : il a mis longtemps ici, il ne finisse pas
<30 : tous les animaux chez le lion vont finir et même eux tous, tous vont mourir
<30F : c'est pour cela qu'il veut reprendre le secret
<30 : c'est ça le problème !
<30 : il faut qu'ils s'entendent entre eux
<30F : le lion a aussi sa femme, on ne peut pas rembourser la femme
ANIMATEUR: la femme n'est pas la question
<30 : il faut d'abord interdire au chien de venir chez le lion
ANIMATEUR: mais il va mourir !
<30 : mais si non il va aussi finir tous les animaux chez le lion !
ANIMATEUR: il va chasser où ?
<30 : ailleurs, il y a des animaux ailleurs peut-être
<30 : le lion reste avec le secret et ils partagent le terrain
<30F : quel soit le cas, le chien va gagner parce qu'il a le secret
<30 : comme ils sont des amis !
ANIMATEUR: l'autre a dit qu'ils doivent s'entendre entre eux. Qu'est-ce que vous en pensez ?
<30 : qu'ils chassent durablement !
<30 : si c'est pour longtemps ils vont toujours finir
<30F : non, ils peuvent se reproduire
<30 : je n'ai pas confiance au chien
<30 : est-ce que tu peux limiter leur nature ? Non, je ne crois pas. Ils restent toujours comme ça
<30 plusieurs : pourquoi ? Ils peuvent vivre milles ans et plus
<30 : il y a la reproduction si on chasse doucement. Ils vont se reproduire. Si on chasse ensemble doucement, ça va aller
<30 : et on partage aussi la femme

<30 : mais le chien bénéficiera, il va reprendre sûrement

Debate 2 : the boy and the baby wolfs

<30F : si c'était moi le loup je devrais reprendre le travail parce que grâce au garçon que la poubelle là est remplie. Quand il n'aura pas à manger après un certain temps ça va finir !

ANIMATEUR: ça c'est si tu connais l'histoire toi, mais l'histoire est quand même compliquée. Si tu es petit l'histoire est quand même bizarre. Peut-être ce n'est même pas vrai. Tu es un petit loup, on te demande de reprendre un travail pénible or il y a beaucoup à manger devant toi

<30 : moi, je dis que c'est la loi de la nature. Partout dans le monde les autres dépendent des autres. Dieu a crée ce genre de truc. Moi, je pense que tu ne mange pas seule, les autres mangent aussi. Tu mange quelque chose, tu fais le caca et il y a des autres qui mange aussi ton caca. Dieu a crée comme ça

ANIMATEUR: cela veut dire que tu veux qu'ils reprennent leur travail alors ?

<30 : oui, ils doivent reprendre le travail

ANIMATEUR: il faut se mettre dans la position d'un petit loup. Il y a quelqu'un qui te dit que malgré le fait qu'il y a beaucoup de nourriture il faut reprendre un travail pénible. Tu n'auras jamais la possibilité de voir le profit direct. Le loup il est sous l'arbre. Le garçon profite mais ça ne regarde pas le petit loup. La poubelle est déjà là et ça va souffrir pour sa vie. C'est ne qu'après sa mort, pour sa vie il y aura de la nourriture. Ce ne pas évident

<30F : qu'est-ce que c'est plus intéressant ? Ce que tu as trouvé avec beaucoup de force ou tu as trouvé comme ça ? C'est comme un cadeau mais tu dois aussi travailler pour qu'on te donne comme ça.

<30F : travailler pourquoi ? Quelle est la valeur de travailler ?

<30 : si c'était moi à la place je ne reprends pas le travail

ANIMATEUR: pourquoi pas ?

<30 : j'ai déjà trouvé ma nourriture, pourquoi travailler ?

<30 : si la poubelle finit, ça vient grâce à quoi ?

<30F : je devrais aller travailler pour le petit

ANIMATEUR: est-ce qu'ils vont croire ?

<30 : il ne va pas croire

<30F : il va appeler ses gens pour aller voir le garçon, essayer de comprendre que c'est mieux de travailler, même si c'est pénible. Ils peuvent peut-être travailler 2, 3, jours, et le garçon attrape 8 animaux et les loups peuvent aussi profiter de se reposer un peu. Et l'enfant peut aussi les aider comme ça donc…

<30 : moi, je veux dire pour manger il faut travailler. Il faut que les loups se mettent au travail et le garçon mange aussi

ANIMATEUR: oui, mais le travail est dur et il y a des nourritures cadeau. Imaginez que vous avez votre champ d mil à côté. Maintenant il y a un grand être qui arrive, tu le vois comme Dieu et il dit que tu dois aller loin pour faire un travail, est-ce que vas croire ?

<30 : je dis qu'il faut travailler

<30F : tu dois avoir la sueur sur ton corps, il faut d'abord travailler

ANIMATEUR: mais lui a aussi raison (refer to third speaker)

<30 : Dieu donne toute la possibilité de travailler. Si non les animaux vont aussi ailleurs et tu vas faire quoi après ? On ne peut pas remettre ça

<30 : si c'était moi, je devais reprendre le travail. Ce sont les seules qui peuvent aider le petit à vivre et le petit fait la poubelle. La poubelle est là grâce au garçon et aux loups. Si les loups arrêtent, le petit ne mange pas

<30F : oui, et la poubelle finit d'exister

ANIMATEUR: oui, mais il s'en fiche, la poubelle est grande, ça lui suffit

<30 : les loups aussi vont vivre, même si le petit meure les loups vont continuer à chasser encore
ANIMATEUR: alors, c'est mieux de rester à la poubelle et après tu reprends la chasse alors ?
<30 : mais le petit va mourir !
ANIMATEUR: e st-ce que c'est son problème ?
<30F : ça, c'est la paresse
<30 : après moi, qu'il mange ce qui est sur la poubelle. Si on me donne 1 million je ne pars plus à l'école. Je vais utiliser l'argent jusqu'à ça finit. Pourquoi travailler encore ?
<30 : mais ça c'est exploiter !
<30 : comment travailler encore s'il y a l'argent ?
<30 : qui va donner si on ne travail plus ?
Discussion
<30 : je ne travail pas pour rien, s'il y a à manger
<30F : il faut travailler
<30 : le garçon est trop petit pour travailler, ce sont les loups qui 'aide à chasser en buvant leur sang. Le reste c'est la poubelle. Donc c'est le cycle, ça tourne
<30 : les petits loups n'ont pas besoin de grands loups ? C'est comment?
ANIMATEUR: ils sont seuls comme le garçon et petit par rapport à lui
<30 : ils doivent continuer à faire leur travail
ANIMATEUR: même si le petit meure ce n'est pas son problème ou bien ?
<30 : si les animaux ne mangent pas, le petit ne mange pas
<30 : si c'était moi à la place de loup, je ne chassais pas parce que c'est aussi dangereux. La poubelle est plus sûr. Attaquer ça ne vaut pas la peine, la saleté ne peut pas tuer les animaux
<30F : ce n'est pas ça
Discussion
ANIMATEUR: qui donne encore son opinion ?
<30 : ils ne sont pas d'accord avec moi
<30 : peut-être tu vas tomber malade un jour, il faut prévoir. Il faut garder les choses avant de manger. C'est pour dire que l'homme noir….
ANIMATEUR: reprends le sujet du conte
<30 : non moi, je ne reprends jamais ce travail là parce que j'ai trouvé quelque chose à manger. Je vais souffrir pour rien, je ne peux pas. Il y a à manger
<30 : non ce n'est pas ça
<30 : il s'en fiche si le petit meure. Est-ce que ça te regarde ?
<30F : il faut aussi avoir pitié de petit garçon
ANIMATEUR: tu as pitié de quelque chose que tu ne vois même pas dans la dimension normale ?
<30F : s'il n'avait pas pitié du garçon pourquoi il avait amené le garçon a la poubelle pour lui montrer la nourriture alors ?
<30 : est-ce qu'il a dit aux loups que sans lui ils vont mourir ?
<30 : oui, il a dit, il a tout expliqué
<30F : le petit aide aussi les loups
<30 : par exemple, tu as 100 F dans la poche et j'ai faim, est-ce que tu vas me donner 100 F ?
<30 : on va partager
<30 : est-ce que ça te regarde ?
<30F : on va partager, je ne suis pas à famine, c'est pour aider
<30 : si je lui donne tout, je vais aussi rester en famine

ANIMATEUR: dans le cas de conte, ce n'est pas un échange comme les francs, si tu vas travailler ou pas ça ne change rien pour toi, il y aura toujours la nourriture. Peut-être pour l'avenir, pour tes enfants mais tu ne sais pas

<30 : il mange maintenant mais dans l'avenir ça sera fini un jour

<30 : mais demain tu cherche autrement à manger, tu reprends la chasse

<30 : après moi, je ne reprends pas le travail, je reste à la poubelle

<30 : et le petit sera mort !

<30 : comment ça te regarde ?

<30 : je finis d'abord la poubelle et je reprends le travail après, pourquoi reprendre le travail ? Je mange le mil et si ça finit, je fais encore ou j'amène au marché

<30 : mais c'est une manière d'avoir pitié des autres. Si tu ne travail pas ça peut gêner. Il ne faut pas être égoïste

<30F : il a pitié de quelqu'un qui a aussi besoin de la nourriture. Le petit a raison de travailler parce que le garçon aussi mange. Il a aussi montré sa poubelle. Il faut travailler pour manger

ANIMATEUR: et tu feras quoi ?

<30 : madame, il n'y a pas la comparaison entre un animal et un être humain, il n'y a pas

ANIMATEUR: pourquoi ?

<30 : un animal c'est un animal, un homme c'est un homme

<30 : Dieu a donné la nourriture aux créatures, pourquoi travailler encore ?

<30 : Le petit a aussi eu sa nourriture. Les loups se nourrissent de deux façons, ils ont le bénéfice

<30F : les petits loups ont raison pour recommencer le travail

<30 : est-ce que ça te regarde avec le petit là, ce n'est pas ton problème

<30 : nous sommes différents des animaux

<30F : il faut aider le petit garçon

<30F : moi je dis, la bête est la bête, elle ne réfléchit pas. S'il s'agit des animaux ils préfèrent de manger jusqu'à encore finir. Si c'était l'être humain, il pouvait reprendre le travail

<30 : l'animal ne réfléchit jamais

<30F : oui, mais on parle dans le cas que l'animal a compris ce que le petit disait

Debate 3 : the boy and his destructive mood

<30 : c'est mieux de tuer le papillon parce que si on ne tue pas le papillon on n'aura plus du bois de chauffage

ANIMATEUR: il y aura toujours le bois. Haman ne va pas tout finir. Il est seule mais le travail devient plus dur, c'est ça. Les femmes seront dérangées

<30F : c'est mieux de tuer le papillon, il est moins utile

<30F : non c'est mieux de travailler, après ça. L'espèce va disparaître, les papillons vont finir

ANIMATEUR: il ne tue pas tous mais ils vont souffrir

<30F : c'est mieux de conserver le papillon

ANIMATEUR: est-ce qu'il est utile ?

<30F : il est utile, surtout pour la science, ça étude le papillon et en plus c'est aussi un être qu'il faut protéger comme la nature

<30 : je ne vois pas l'utilité

<30 : le travail devient pénible

<30 : l'arbre aussi est très utile, ça donne l'oxygène. Ç a respire aussi

<30 : l'arbre est aussi animé. Si tu tapes l'arbre ou le papillon, c'est la même chose

<30 : c’est mieux de taper le bois
ANIMATEUR: oui mais pour les femmes cela devient pénible
<30F : c’est mieux de travailler
<30F : il y a du bois et les animaux souffrent
<30 : n’est-ce pas tu es une femme ? Tu veux encore souffrir dans ce monde ?
<30F : non ce n’est pas ça. Les animaux souffrent
<30 : comment veux-tu travailler pour un papillon ?
<30 : c’est mieux de tuer, détruire les animaux
<30F : non c’est mieux le bois. Il y a des autres choses pour utiliser
<30 : tuer Haman
ANIMATEUR: le chef ne peut pas, c’est son fils
<30 : moi je dis, c’est mieux de tuer le papillon. En détruisant le bois les femmes doivent aller loin
<30F : mais cette souffrance va finir, on peut utiliser le gaz aussi
<30 : dans le village il n’y a pas
<30 : il faut détruire le papillon parce qu’il est nuisible
<30 plusieurs : voilà!!!
<30F : les papillons doivent aussi se multiplier, c’est la nature. On ne connaît pas l’utilité mais autres peuvent connaître
<30 : il n’y a pas d’utilité
<30F : oui, autres connaissent. Ils jouent un grand rôle dans la nature. C’est beau à voir dans le village, ils volent et tout
<30 : ces insectes sont nuisibles
ANIMATEUR: même s’ils sont nuisibles, ils n’ont pas le droit de vivre ?
<30F : ils ont le droit de vivre
<30 : je dis qu’on tape le papillon
<30F : mais il souffre, il meurt !
<30 : ce n’est pas normal que l’homme doit travailler pour un insecte
<30 : oui c’est mieux
<30F : non, il faut couper les arbres, ils ne sentent rien
<30 : l’arbre respire aussi, il donne l’oxygène
ANIMATEUR: mais tu peux couper le bois, et l’arbre reste vivant, ça pousse encore
<30: entrons nous un peu dans la science, la photosynthèse, l’arbre respire, il donne l’oxygène
ANIMATEUR: tuer un papillon n’est pas le même que couper
<30 : mais je vois que tout être vivant a une raison de vivre, on a moins de papillons que des arbres dans le monde. Si on coupe les branches l’arbre reste mais si on tue le papillon il n’aura plus dans l’avenir
ANIMATEUR: nous ne sommes pas encore d’accord je crois
<30 : s’il essaye d’encore couper tous les bras des arbres, l’arbre doit encore repousser mais s’il tue le papillon on ne sait pas s’il tue la mère ou le père ou bien les enfants. C’est mieux de débrancher les arbres. Ça peut encore repousser
ANIMATEUR: d’accord mais si c’était encore ta femme qui doit repartir en brousse tous les jours pour travailler pour chercher le bois, et peut-être le papillon va encore te menacer, j’ai compris qu’il est nuisible
<30F : je préfère laisser le papillon
<30 : ce n’est pas une seule femme qui parte en brousse, et puis les femmes vont partir et découper tout. Nos femmes du village vont couper tout et il ne va rester rien. On aura encore besoin de chauffage donc on va encore détruire pour faiblir les plantes

<30F : je préfère souffrir que de tuer un être
<30 : ils sont animés comme nous
<30F : je sais sûre qu'avec les arbres ça va mais les êtres souffrent
ANIMATEUR: mais si le papillon vient te déranger dans l'œil, tu ne le tue pas ?
<30F : on le chasse, c'est leur travail. Si le papillon est venu me provoquer, là c'est diffèrent. Dans ce cas là le papillon est tranquille
<30 : s'il vient à la plantation, elle qui n'a rien fait…!
<30F : ce n'est pas ça. Pour aller loin c'est autre chose que la souffrance
<30 : sans le bois le papillon ne pouvait pas exister
<30 : autres connaissent qu'ils sont des parasites
<30F : pourtant ils ont le droit de vivre
ANIMATEUR: je n'ai pas encore entendu ton opinion
<30 : après moi, mieux de tuer le papillon, je ne peux pas laisser les femmes souffrir à cause des insectes pour rien. La femme c'est la vie et le papillon là tous sont des ennuis
<30F : on ne détruit pas la nature
ANIMATEUR: prenons maintenant entre le bois et les animaux de la brousse comme le lapin et le lièvre. Il faut choisir lequel ?
<30F : non laisser les animaux vivre
<30 : comment ?
<30 : mieux de prendre le bois
<30F : le papillon !
<30F : tu pourras manger le bois ? Si on tue les animaux on va manger quoi ?
ANIMATEUR: on ne va pas tuer tous les animaux
<30 : tu vas préparer les animaux avec quoi ?
<30 : mieux de tuer les animaux et rester avec le bois
<30F : ils ont le droit de vivre !
ANIMATEUR: quand même l'animal souffre !
<30F : vraiment !
<30 : le bois est important
<30 : il faut travailler pour manger c'est normal
<30 : tue le papillon
ANIMATEUR: même s'il y a encore des papillons qui quand même souffrent. Haman ne va pas finir les animaux. Ça ce n'est pas le problème. C'est qu'il va blesser les animaux. Ils vont souffrir. La question est si les animaux ont aussi le droit de vivre en paix. A cause d'un éléphant par exemple, doivent les femmes travailler
<30 : l'éléphant a aussi le droit de vivre, il n'est pas nuisible
ANIMATEUR: mais ils dévastent les champs !
<30 : ils peuvent dévaster mais ne pas comme le papillon, les papillons sont nombreux
<30 : le bois est très important parce que ça sert à chauffer. Si non il y aura le désert
ANIMATEUR: le problème n'est pas que les arbres finissent. Le problème c'est que les femmes doivent plus travailler
<30 : le paillon est inutile pour la vie de l'homme, qu'est-ce qu'il va faire avec ?
<30F : non, il a aussi une vie
ANIMATEUR: prenons entre le bois et le lapin
<30 plusieurs : mieux tuer le lapin
<30F : non, mieux l'arbre

<30 : on va préparer le lapin avec quoi ?
<30 : je ne comprends pas si c'est tuer entièrement
<30 : c'est la geste de taper, de couper. Il menace, il torture
<30 : les arbres repoussent
ANIMATEUR: les papillons sont faibles, ils peuvent mourir
<30 : le papillon aussi peut se reproduire
<30F : jamais !
ANIMATEUR: et entre les animaux du village et le bois ?
<30 plusieurs : mieux menacer les animaux
<30F : non le bois
<30 : c'est mieux de laisser le cheval parce qu'avec le cheval tu peux même aller chercher le bois plus loin
<30 : je vois clairement
ANIMATEUR: prenons un animal avec lequel tu ne peux pas aller chercher le bois, le mouton par exemple, entre le mouton et le bois ?
<30 plusieurs : c'est conserver le bois, les moutons ne vont pas mourir quand même
ANIMATEUR: le mouton n'a pas le droit de vivre ?
<30F : il a le droit, il faut laisser la vie à valeur, le bois n'est pas plus important qu'une vie
<30 : mais la vie c'est la souffrance, n'est-ce pas. Haman va toujours menacer
<30F : je préfère que les femmes souffrent que de tuer les êtres
ANIMATEUR: par rapport au mouton ?
<30 plusieurs : mieux de tuer le mouton !
<30F : moi je ne suis pas d'accord
<30 : quand on tue les animaux on peut les manger !
<30F : on va manger mais pas menacer
<30 : entre l'arbre et le mouton, le mouton est quand même très utile
<30 : ce n'est pas ça. Si tu es malade, tu te sens mal
<30 : il faut voir au niveau de reproduction. Si on tue les animaux ils vont reproduire, les arbres vont repousser plus vite, pour cela c'est mieux de laisser les moutons
ANIMATEUR: et entre le lion et le bois ?
<30 : le lion est notre première ennemie
<30 : mais je préfère laisser le lion
<30 : ça alors !
ANIMATEUR: le lion va aussi souffrir
<30 : l'arbre est très important. Il faut tuer le lion parce que le lion aussi il menace nos animaux
ANIMATEUR: le lion n'a pas le droit de vivre ?
<30 plusieurs : il a un droit de vivre mais malheureusement il menace les autres animaux
<30F : c'est son droit aussi. Même si on ne connaît pas l'utilité d'un animal c'est Dieu qui connaît
<30 : non ce n'est pas son droit
<30 : il mange le mouton, la chèvre, il est méchant
<30F : les femmes doivent souffrir de leur part
<30 plusieurs : aux causes des animaux???
<30 : la femme est née pour travailler
<30F : ce n'est pas ça
José: moi j'ai une solution. Les femmes restent à la maison et les hommes cherchent le bois
<30 : il y a des hommes qui vont la cuisine ? Chacun son travail

<30 : après les arbres les femmes vont souffrir. C'est mieux de tuer les animaux
<30 : oui, c'est mieux de tuer les animaux, le papillon et autres n'ont pas d'utilité
<30 : ils respirent comme toi ! . Les êtres qui respirent ont aussi le droit de vivre
<30F : les arbres ne souffrent pas
<30 : on ne dévaste pas tout, on débranche seulement
<30 : tuer le papillon
<30 : on ne tue pas le papillon
<30 : parce que l'arbre ne respire pas ?
<30 : madame, vous avez dit que le gars frappe n'est-ce pas ? Frapper le papillon, cela fait aussi tuer le papillon. Il peut aussi tuer les arbres
<30 : le papillon est plus faible

Example 3: debate in Guividig with older men

Debate 1 : the lion and the dog

>50: moi je veux dire que la raison revient au chien
>50: pourquoi dis-tu cela ? La raison doit revenir au lion parce que le lion a eu confiance au chien et a laissé alors la femme pour le cadeau. Le chien ne doit plus venir dans le territoire du lion pour chasser. Conte tenu que le chien a déjà fini les animaux chez lui. Le chef même avant de donner sa fille il a mal jugé, le tort va même au chef.
>50 : le chien a provoqué parce que le chien quand on a déjà une femme, c'est une chose de valeur. Quand vous voyez la blanche qui est assise là c'est une personne avec valeur ! Si quelqu'un te laisse la femme comme ça….Vraiment c'est le chien qui a tort qui réclamer son cadeau.
>50 : le chien a une connaissance qui est supérieure. Il a fini tous les animaux chez lui et maintenant il chasse encore chez le lion. S'il y a une chose dans le monde qui peut finir, c'est le chien qui peut finir puisqu'il a fini les animaux chez lui, il voudra aussi finir chez le lion. Tout le monde sera en famine. Donc le chien est méchant, il n'est pas sérieux.
>50: si le chien laisse sa connaissance au lion, le lion aussi peut finir tout son territoire. Actuellement comme on a semé le mil nous allons récolter et après on va aussi manger tout. C'est de cette façon que le chien a fini et le lion va aussi finir.
>50 : le chien est parti se plaindre chez le chef et le chef doit juger l'affaire. Le chien dit voici comme je me suis entendu avec le lion et le lion dit que ce n 'est pas comme ça et le lion dit si le chien veut reprendre le secret il doit aussi rembourser la femme
ANIMATEUR: n'est-ce pas que la femme est déjà vieille ? Il ne faut pas regarder la femme, il faut trancher l'affaire.
Audience: c'est le lion qui a raison, il a laissé la femme au lion
>50 : Le lion a tué seulement une partie de son territoire, mais le chien a tout fini. Il a bénéficié d'une femme et revient maintenant reprendre son secret ? Vraiment, le chien est méchant.
>50 : Normalement le chef devrait demander au chien de donner toute sa connaissance au lion mais le chien doit encore avoir gardé quelque chose pour lui, le voilà pourquoi il vient chez le lion.
>50 : le lion est patient, si non, il devait luter et le chien est faible. Le lion peut l'écraser dans une minute. Le chien profite seulement de sa connaissance suprême.
ANIMATEUR: mais le lion pouvait aussi arracher la femme, il n'a pas fait parce que ce sont des amis.
>50 : c'est le chien qui n'est pas sérieux, il est méchant

ANIMATEUR: Actuellement tout le monde a donné tort au chien. L'interprétation qu'on fait c'est que comme les blancs sont venus chez nous pour demander de ne pas couper tous les bois ou de ne pas tuer tous les animaux car ils seront finis et on n'aura rien.

>50 : c'est vrai ce que tu dis. Tout d'abord les gens ont commencé à pêcher des poissons à partir de Yagoua jusqu'à Pousse, de Pousse jusqu'à Zina et de Zina jusqu'à Koussiri et Lac Tchad et le constat général c'est que nous n'avons plus de poissons comme auparavant. Actuellement il y a deux qualités des poissons qui ont disparu. Selon moi, d'ici peu du temps on va dépenser beaucoup pour une petite chose à manger. Mais on ne finit pas les choses, il y aura toujours un autre territoire.

>50 : il y avait assez de bois à Douma, les gens ont commencé à couper. Ils ont fini ces arbres et ils ont continué à Melemé. Ils vont continuer encore ailleurs. Vraiment les blancs nous aiment beaucoup. Ils nous demandent de ne pas couper les arbres. Nous en avons coupé et actuellement on souffre beaucoup pour avoir du bois. Avec mon argent en main même pour avoir le bois c'est difficile ici à Guividig et combien de fois ailleurs. C'est la même chose pour les poissons que nos parents pêchaient dans l'époque Actuellement il n'y a plus rien. De cette façon là le nombre des personnes va augmenter mais les choses vont diminuer comme on dit dans le Coran.

Debate 2 : the boy and the ants

>50 : à mon avis bien que l'enfant bénéficie de la chair des animaux affaiblis par les fourmis mais il ne trouve pas cela plus important que la poubelle. Il est plutôt content quand il voit les fourmis dans la poubelle entrain de manger. Il est aussi content de voir les fourmis sur les animaux.

ANIMATEUR: mais est-ce que les déchets versés dans la poubelle ne finissent pas ? Comment vous dîtes que les fourmis ne veulent pas repartir ?

>50 : mais même s'ils finissent la poubelle, c'est une chose là déjà salie

>50 : en vérité, les fourmis doivent repartir à leur place. Elles doivent seulement revenir au moment où l'enfant aura déjà fait de grands tas dans la poubelle pour tirer profit. Ceci donnera de la nourriture à l'enfant.

>50 : essayez de voir, les fourmis trouvent que c'est tout à fait pénible de monter encore. Sans peine elles ont trouvé leur nourriture et doivent rester là au niveau de la poubelle

>50 : alors selon moi il faudra trouver un terrain d'entente pour que chacun de ces animaux trouve à manger sans cesse

>50 : tout ce que nous venons de dire revient à dire que pour toute chose pour qu'elle soit durable il lui faut un terrain d'entente. C'est la raison pour laquelle on nous demande de nous unir toujours pour qu'on développe d'avantage ou de mieux en mieux. A partir de cela nous aurons un bien commun qui ne finira jamais et chacun de nous sera servi selon ses besoins. D'où la nécessité d'avoir une entente entre l'enfant et les fourmis pour que tout aille mieux.

ANIMATEUR: selon les attitudes des fourmis êtes-vous sûrs qu'elles vont repartir sur les arbres ou non ?

>50 : j'ai comme l'impression que les fourmis n'ont pas l'air de repartir mais vraiment si elles ne repartent pas l'enfant souffrira. Il est resté sans rien, vous-mêmes vous le constatez. De même les fourmis vont aussi souffrir car tant que l'homme n'entasse pas, elles n'ont pas à manger sans peine comme elles pensent. Tout leur manger coupera court, ni pour l'homme ni pour les fourmis.

>50 : moi je voudrais que les fourmis s'entendent avec l'enfant en ce sens que les fourmis remontent pour sucer le sang des animaux et l'enfant tirera maintenant bénéfice, et encore les fourmis reviennent de plus tirer profit. Avec cette manière de faire tout ira bien et le cycle continuera sans fin. Dans le cas contraire tout le monde mourra de faim

ANIMATEUR: moi, je suis entrain de voir que les fourmis bénéficient deux fois. Premièrement du sang des animaux et deuxièmement de leurs parties après usage par l'enfant

>50 : est-ce que les animaux ne vont pas finir s'il faut laisser les fourmis sucer leur sang ?

>50 : mais est-ce que les choses faites par Dieu finissent ?

ANIMATEUR: mais comme toi tu dis que les animaux ne finissent pas. Donne-nous tes points de vue, puisque nous attendons le point de vue de chacun de nous

>50 : comme nous l'avons dit là, les fourmis doivent s'entendre avec l'enfant pour mieux continuer leur vie. Mais ici même les fourmis bénéficient jusqu'à deux fois, plus que l'enfant.

>50 : il est question d'entente car maintenant c'est nous qui nous avons rassemblé ici et chacun de nous a eu de la kola et beaucoup de chose, alors s'il n'y a pas rassemblement, la kola et autre chose que la kola reviendraient à quelques-uns uns mais pas à tous. Donc il y a une entente entre vous et nous et nous sommes contents d'avoir causé et reçu un cadeau

>50 : si c'était moi à la place de l'enfant si les fourmis refusent de monter, je brûlerai toute la poubelle.

>50 : mais si l'enfant brûle la poubelle il sera le premier d'être mort

>50 : il n'aura même pas accès à brûler la poubelle. Les fourmis peuvent même attaquer l'enfant. Seulement qu'elles ne veulent pas faire du mal à l'enfant, si non il possède du sang qu'elles peuvent bien sucer et il mourra après tout. Les fourmis d'autre part sont entrain de patienter, elles aussi, si non c'est facile pour eux de tuer l'enfant.

>50 : l'enfant ne leur suffit pas non plus

>50 : mais Haman, quand la Semry était entre vos mains, vous aviez tout l'argent que s'y trouvaient vous l'aviez mis à genoux. Elle n'a plus rien. N'est-ce pas vous êtes maintenant revenu dedans bien que vous ayez fini la Semry ? Alors c'est parce qu'il n'y a pas une entente. S'il y avait d'entente la Semry ne serait jamais mal fait. C'est donc la même chose entre les fourmis et l'enfant. Nous pouvons dire que toute chose à son temps à lui. On peut finir ce qu'on a trouvé et trouver d'autre ailleurs. Nous ne pouvons pas rester sur la même chose.

>50 : maintenant il faut qu'elles changent ce qu'elles mangeaient, ça serait la meilleure solution.

>50 : il faut que les fourmis ne mangent plus les déchets jetés à la poubelle et ne sucent plus le sang. Elles doivent trouver une autre alimentation autre que les deux premières. Je voudrais dire actuellement nous nous nourrissons du mil rouge. Alors nous pouvons changer en riz.

>50 : mais si nous le changeons en riz, la première chose est que nous aurons d'abord de la diarrhée de s'habituer

>50 : actuellement c'est devenu comme un bien commun à ces deux chasseurs qui attendent que les animaux viennent d'abord au bord de l'eau pour pouvoir tirer profit. Pour ce fait il faut une fois de plus que les fourmis repartent encore sur les arbres afin que l'enfant aussi en tire profit

>50 : les fourmis ont catégoriquement refusé de remonter, elles ne veulent même plus

>50 : dans ce cas ce sont les fourmis qui sont fautives puisque nous cultivons pour manger prochainement. Il faut donc qu'elles pensent à leur avenir.

ANIMATEUR: ainsi, selon vous comment elles doivent s'entendre comme les fourmis refusent de monter ? L'enfant est tellement affamé. Faut-il le laisser mourir ?

>50 : d'enfant et les fourmis doivent prier les uns des autres

>50 : les fourmis ne veulent plus monter. Elles ont déjà trouvé à manger sans souffrance, repartir est impossible

>50 : si l'enfant est malin il faut qu'il prie aux fourmis comme vous voyez, je n'ai rien à manger, veuillez donc m'aider. Elles lui donneront une solution

>50 : c'est bien toi qui apporte à manger et si je demande d'apporter d'avantage pour que je puisse stocker ces biens afin que nous mangions sans fin. Est-ce que c'est une mauvaise chose ?

>50 : nous devons nous prier les uns des autres et trouver un terrain d'entente favorable à nous tous,

>50 : ce sont les fourmis qui sont de mauvaise humeur. Pour cela l'enfant doit prier les fourmis comme suit: Pardon, fourmis, je te prie de bien vouloir me donner des idées pour que je puisse survivre. Alors si l'enfant ne fait pas ainsi il ne se retrouvera jamais toute sa vie

>50 : avant tout ce sont les fourmis qui ont apporté à manger mais avec peine. Mais dès qu'elles ont découvert le raccourcit, elles refusent encore de monter. Alors c'est mieux que l'enfant diminue les déchets de la poubelle petite à petit

>50 : eh, Adamou, comment tu es au bord du mayo et que tu te laves les mains à l'aide de tes urines ? N'est-ce pas que les animaux n'appartiennent pas à l'enfant ?

ANIMATEUR: non, ils ne lui appartiennent pas

>50 : mais les animaux de la brousse que les chasseurs tuent. Leurs peaux sont toujours cachées et gardées quelque part. Alors l'enfant n'a pas caché et gardé les peaux et les déchets de ces animaux et il a fait plutôt un tas à la poubelle, lequel tas est une bonne chose pour les fourmis. Donc les fourmis ont trouvé leurs goûts et elles n'ont pas à se fatiguer à monter l'arbre. C'est plutôt l'enfant qui s'est crée de problème en faisant pour attirer les fourmis. Pour le moment c'est l'enfant qui sera le premier à mourir, car les fourmis ont pris la décision de ne jamais monter et ne vont jamais s'entendre avec l'enfant

>50 : l'enfant dépassé par les fourmis est censé aller matin et soir demander aux fourmis de le secourir tout en leur expliquant qu'il est vraiment dépassé par la faim.

Debate 3 : the boy and his destructive mood

ANIMATEUR: selon vous qu'elle est la chose qu'on peut permettre à l'enfant têtu de gâter pour que les hommes restent en paix ? Eh, comme il détruit tout…

>50 : parlant de l'enfant, je crois que vous disiez qu'il détruise les oiseaux (mange-mil)

ANIMATEUR: mais tu ne crois pas que les oiseaux ont aussi une âme ?

>50 : si je l'ai dit c'est parce qu'ils détruisent beaucoup de choses comme le mil et le riz

>50 : de mon avis ce que je peux autoriser à l'enfant de détruire sur cette terre ce sont les moustiques. Il faut qu'il détruise tous les moustiques du monde. Je serai vraiment content dans ma vie

>50 : mais même les moustiques sont aussi crée par Dieu

>50 : et tous les autres choses que pensez-vous donner pour détruire ne sont-elles pas crées par Dieu ?

>50 : si j'ai parlé des moustiques c'est parce qu'ils ne font que déranger les gens. Ils ne servent à rien.

>50 : il ne faut pas aller contre la volonté de Dieu car toute la chose que Dieu a crée est nécessaire

>50 : bien sûr mais le moustique ne fait que piquer, C'est que c'est un être embêtant qui est vraiment à détruire.

>50 : toutes les choses que nous voyons dans la nature ou dans le globe terrestre sont crées par Dieu pour que l'on s'en serve à l'exemple du bois, des poissons et beaucoup autre chose

>50 : il est mieux qu'on s'entende pour donner à l'enfant ce qui est à détruire

ANIMATEUR: nous demandons le point de vue de chacun considéré comme juge. Ce n'est pas question de s'entendre avant de décider. Chacun de nous est considéré comme chef

>50 : Mr. M. nous a demandé que chacun juge personnellement l'enfant

>50 : chez eux il n'y a pas de prison ?

>50 : il peut tuer toutes les personnes qui sont dans la prison

>50 : selon moi je permettrai détruire seulement les chenilles qui attaquent les niébés

>50 : quant à moi, je vais plutôt le laisser faire la pêche

>50 : non, pour les poissons c'est grave. Il va finir tous les poissons du monde

>50 : moi je vous ai parlé des moustiques qui ne font que piquer les gens et apportent rien à l'homme

>50 : si ça dépend de moi il faut qu'il me tue tous les chiens

ANIMATEUR: oncle, toi, tu veux qu'il tue tous les chiens et vous autres, vous dîtes quoi ?

>50 : quant à moi il y a des choses suivantes : les moustiques, les chenilles et les insectes

>50 :toi tu as vraiment raison, les insectes ont dévasté les plants de sorgho et après ça nous sommes restés affamés

ANIMATEUR: nous allons passer au vote, il y a deux personnes qui veulent que les moustiques soient détruits et deux personnes qui veulent tuer les chenilles et trois personnes qui veulent détruire les oiseaux et une seule personne qui veut maltraiter le chien.

ANIMATEUR: et entre les moustiques et l'éléphant ?

>50 : c'est mieux de détruire les moustiques puisque l'éléphant vient seulement. Par moment alors que les moustiques nous piquent presque toute l'année et ils nous donnent le paludisme comme maladie

ANIMATEUR: alors entre le bois et les éléphants, qu'est-ce qu'il faut détruire ?

>50 : C'est mieux de laisser le bois et détruire l'éléphant car le bois nous sert pour faire la cuisine et les toits des maisons. Le bois donne aussi l'ombre. Chez nous sans bois, on ne peut pas vivre. L'éléphant ne nous sert presque à rien

ANIMATEUR: cela veut donc dire que l'éléphant n'est pas un être comme nous ? Est-ce qu'il doit souffrir parce qu'il nous sert à rien ? Il n'a pas le droit de vivre comme les autres sur terre ?

>50 : sans vous mentir nous ne connaissons pas l'importance de l'éléphant, Exemple : c'est tout dernièrement que j'ai vu l'éléphant depuis que je suis né. Je ne crois vraiment pas son importance par rapport au bois. Je dis cela par rapport à notre milieu. S'il n'y a pas du bois nous n'avons pas droit au manger, aux maisons et beaucoup d'autre encore. Nous mangerons des feuilles des arbres.

ANIMATEUR: comment trouvez-vous le bois et les hippopotames selon leur importance ?

>50 : comme j'ai dis du niveau des éléphants, le bois demeure toujours supérieur, car les hippopotames se nourrissent des herbes et des herbes sont considérées comme du bois. La valeur du bois n'est pas à comparer avec celle de l'hippopotame. Vous pouvez comparer tant des choses avec le bois mais je ne vois pas l'équivalent du bois selon la valeur importante.

ANIMATEUR: et entre les femmes du village et le bois ?

>50 : nous ne pouvons jamais comparer l'être humains au bois, même si le monde est entrain de finir

ANIMATEUR: mais les animaux, il n'y a pas ceux qui dépassent le bois ?

>50 : ici chez nous, non peut être ailleurs. Nous faisons les maisons à l'aide du bois, pour faire loger les animaux domestiques par exemple.

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Nederlandse samenvatting

"De eekhoorn zei tegen de hyena: stop je staart maar in de termietenheuvel dan bind ik je kadootje eraan vast. En dat deed de hebberige hyena. Nog een beetje verder, zei de eekhoorn. Stiekem maakte de eekhoorn de staart vast aan een boomwortel. Toen pakte hij een doornstruik en prikte daarmee in de anus van de hyena. De hyena vluchtte weg en zijn staart brak af. Daarom hebben hyena's zo'n rare afgebroken staart, omdat ze zo hebberig zijn."
Fragment van lokaal verhaal uit extreem noorden van Kameroen

"De Aziatische olifant schreeuwt om hulp. Het eens zo trotse dier dat 100 jaar geleden nog heerste van Irak tot China ziet zijn leefgebieden in sneltreinvaart verkleinen en versnipperen. Straks is er geen ruimte meer voor hem over. In Azië wonen zoveel mensen dat de olifant hoe langer hoe meer in een hoek gedrukt wordt. De Aziatische olifant krijgt het flink benauwd omdat hij geen kant opkan. Daarom vernielt hij akkers en vertrapt huizen. Uit wraak worden de 'schuldigen' vergiftigd of afgeschoten door de lokale bevolking. Nog even en de Aziatische olifant is uitgestorven."
Fragment van een supra-lokaal verhaal (WNF: Panda-winter 1997)

In de afgelopen decennia is er in toenemende mate bezorgdheid van met name Westerse landen voor het mondiale behoud van natuur en milieu. Omdat veel van de mondiale natuurlijke hulpbronnen geconcentreerd zijn in ontwikkelingslanden opereren talloze Westers georiënteerde organisaties in deze landen in al even zoveel projecten om natuurlijke hulpbronnen duurzaam te beheren en zo veilig te stellen voor toekomstige generaties. De laatste jaren is duidelijk geworden dat voor een werkelijk vruchtbare resultaten de lokale bevolking in deze landen werkelijk actief betrokken moet worden bij deze projecten. Dientengevolge zijn natuurgerichte ontwikkelingsprojecten zich steeds meer gaan richten op samenwerking met de lokale bevolking (vaak samengevat met termen zoals co-management of participatie). In veel gevallen blijkt deze samenwerking echter uiterst moeizaam, met name omdat niet altijd dezelfde normen en waarden gedeeld worden. Het sleutelbegrip in deze samenwerking lijkt communicatie te zijn. Ondanks de talloze pogingen samen te werken met de lokale bevolking blijkt in de praktijk communicatie vaak een eenrichtingsverkeer, gedomineerd door een Westerse stijl van praten en denken. Er is behoefte aan een communicatievorm die evenwichtiger is en de verschillende partijen op een evenwichtige en actieve manier betrekt in de problematiek.
Dit proefschrift beschrijft een studie in Kameroen (een ontwikkelingsland met een schat aan natuurlijke hulpbronnen) naar een typisch 'lokale' communicatievorm, namelijk verhalen. Tijdens een vierjarig onderzoek is gekeken hoe lokale verhalen kunnen bijdragen aan de verbetering van een interculturele dialoog over natuur en milieu. Het onderzoek bestaat uit twee delen. Het eerste deel betreft een studie naar lokale verhalen in twee regio's van Kameroen om een indruk te krijgen van lokale percepties en ideeën omtrent de natuur en de

relatie tussen mens en natuur. Tijdens het veldwerk zijn zo'n 500 verhalen verzameld. Deze zijn geanalyseerd en vervolgens vergeleken met de supra-lokale visie zoals dit algemeen wordt uitgedragen door internationale natuur- en milieubeschermingsorganisaties. Het tweede deel betreft het actief gebruik van verhalen als instrument voor communicatie. Dit deel is gedeeltelijk theoretisch maar omvat ook een aantal concrete experimenten in het veld.

In het eerste hoofdstuk wordt de probleemstelling beschreven. De twee partijen in dialoog worden gedefinieerd als lokaal (inwoners van dorpen in Kameroen) en supra-lokaal (natuurbeschermingsorganisaties). Ik ben me ervan bewust dat deze indeling zo zijn beperkingen heeft en in de praktijk veel genuanceerder ligt. De indeling slaat echter in eerste instantie op de verhalen; ieder individu kan gedeeltelijk door beide verhalen-werelden geïnspireerd zijn. Dit in ogenschouw nemende is de hoofdvraag van het onderzoek:
Hoe kunnen verhalen en de methode van verhalenvertellen in Kameroen gebruikt worden als een instrument, zowel methodisch als inhoudelijk, voor het verbeteren van dialoog over natuurbescherming tussen lokale mensen en supra-lokale organisaties?
Voor dat ik met deze vraag aan de slag ga, bespreek ik vrij uitgebreid de morele risico's die in dit onderzoek besloten liggen. Deze betreffen voor een deel het verzamelen van lokale kennis door middel van verhalen, maar met name het overbrengen van informatie op de lokale bevolking door middel van verhalen. Verhalen kunnen gemakkelijk gebruikt worden als een manier om een voor lokalen vaak ongunstige supra-lokale boodschap in een mooi papiertje te verpakken en zo intussen toch gewoon de 'oude' top-down communicatiestijl in stand te houden. Dit is vanzelfsprekend niet de bedoeling van het onderzoek en de morele overwegingen zullen gedurende het gehele boek (met name in hoofdstuk 9) expliciet meegenomen worden.

In het tweede hoofdstuk wordt een theoretisch kader geschapen voor het onderzoek. Het betreft hier niet één theorie doch een overzicht van verschillende inzichten uit de literatuur met betrekking tot de drie hoofdconcepten uit de onderzoeksvraag:
- het proces: communicatie en dialoog,
- het instrument om dit proces te realiseren: verhalen,
- het onderwerp van de dialoog: natuur en milieubescherming.

Met betrekking tot het eerste hoofdconcept worden een aantal inzichten uit de communicatiewetenschap besproken. De nadruk ligt hier op de moderne communicatiewetenschap waarbij een dialoog gezien wordt als een tweezijdig proces waarin ook onderbewuste aspecten een rol spelen. Dit betreft in eerste instantie achterliggende normen en waarden van elke partij. In dit kader is het belangrijk onderscheid te maken tussen informatieve kennisoverdracht en fundamentele kennisoverdracht. Dit laatste raakt aan de achterliggende percepties en vraagt extra aandacht. Voor mijn onderzoek maak ik verder

gebruik van de inzichten uit de 'entertainment-education' aanpak die zich baseert op het feit dat mensen beter leren wanneer ze tegelijkertijd geamuseerd zijn. Twee principes van deze aanpak zijn dat het met name met de onbewuste en indirecte kant van communicatie werkt en dat het uitgaat van het feit dat mensen beter leren in informele situaties (social learning).
Met betrekking tot het tweede hoofdconcept (de verhalen) gaat dit onderzoek er vanuit dat verhalen geen statische teksten zijn maar als actieve en dynamische manieren om de werkelijkheid vorm te geven. Ik baseer me hier onder andere op de inzichten van Bourdieu (praxiologie). Dit betekent ook dat er een direct verband is tussen verhalen en het werkelijke leven. Verhalen kunnen worden veranderd en aangepast en zo gebruikt worden als instrument voor een dialoog. Verder maak ik voor de analyse van de verzamelde verhalen gebruik van een aantal technische begrippen en inzichten uit de narratologie. Dit betreft onder andere de categorisering van verhalen en de manier waarop verhalen manipulatief kunnen werken.
Met betrekking tot het derde hoofdconcept wordt met name ingegaan op de definitie van verschillende concepten zoals natuur en milieu, en de mens-natuur verhouding. Zoals blijkt worden deze concepten zeker niet algemeen gedeeld door iedereen, en de Westerse visie heeft geleid tot vele misverstanden en mythologisering.

Het hoofdstuk besluit met een aantal sleutelconcepten die belangrijk zijn voor de interculturele dialoog. Het betreft hier een aantal vragen zoals geformuleerd door Milton (1996) die kunnen helpen onderliggende aannames duidelijk en bespreekbaar te maken. Eén van die vragen is bijvoorbeeld: wie wordt er gezien als machtiger: de natuur of de mens?

Het derde hoofdstuk bespreekt in het kort de methodologie van het onderzoek. Het betreft hier drie delen: de verzameling van lokale verhalen, de analyse van deze verhalen en het ontwerpen van nieuwe verhalen. De methode van ontwerp is grotendeels nieuw en gebaseerd op voorafgaande inzichten uit het onderzoek. Daarom wordt dit voornamelijk in hoofdstuk 9 besproken.

Hoofdstuk 4 schetst heel in het kort het decor waarin de verhalen verzameld zijn. Het betreft hier twee regio's in Kameroen: het extreem noorden en de centrale provincie. Verschillen zijn groot, zowel ecologisch, politiek, cultureel als economisch. Het noorden is savanne-sahel landschap met een grotendeels islamitische bevolking. De centrale provincie is grotendeels bedekt met bos en wordt bevolkt door overwegend christenen. Bovendien is de centrale provincie het politiek/ economische centrum van het land. De bevolking uit de de centrale provincie waaronder dit onderzoek plaats vond blijkt echter wel oorspronkelijk uit een veel noordelijker gebied te komen. De grote verschillen tussen de gebieden zijn in zekere zin een voordeel wanneer je wilt weten wat de algemene toepasbaarheid van de verhalen als communicatiemethode is.

Na deze vier inleidende hoofdstukken komen we in hoofdstuk 5 aan de presentatie van de lokale verhalen. Het betreft hier een algemene weergave van het totale domein van de verzamelde verhalen. Om het onderzoek zo open mogelijk te houden is bij het verzamelen van de data geen beperking aangebracht wat betreft genre of onderwerp; er is aan de lokale bevolking alleen gevraagd om verhalen te vertellen. Het hoofdstuk bespreekt de setting van het vertellen, de vormaspecten van verhalen en de inhoud zoals bijvoorbeeld terugkerende thema's. Omdat de lokale categorisatie van verhalen vrij beperkt is, heb ik voor de presentatie in dit hoofdstuk gekozen voor een eigen indeling in fictieve verhalen, niet fictieve geschiedkundige verhalen en mythes. De meest opvallende conclusie is dat ondanks de enorme verschillen en afstand tussen beide regio's de verhalen opvallend veel overeenkomst vertonen. Verder blijkt dat verhalen vertellen een enorme variatie kent met betrekking tot wie vertelt, en waar en hoe verteld wordt. Deze vrijheid van verhalen vertellen, gecombineerd met een grote overeenkomst tussen de twee regio's wat betreft de inhoud van de verhalen, maakt dat verhalen vertellen hier een potentieel geschikt middel is voor interculturele communicatie.

In hoofdstuk 6 worden de verzamelde verhalen geanalyseerd met betrekking tot het onderwerp van de dialoog: natuur en milieu. Er bestaan heel veel verhalen met natuurelementen zoals dieren, bomen en landschappen, maar bij nadere analyse blijkt dat de verhalen geen natuurbeschermingsboodschap hebben. Veel verhalen kennen een direct of indirect uitgesproken moraal, maar deze heeft vrijwel altijd betrekking op sociale regels, bijvoorbeeld dat je altijd naar ouderen mensen moet luisteren. Dit betekent niet dat verhalen niets te zeggen hebben over de natuur. Met behulp van de sleutelconcepten uit het tweede hoofdstuk worden een aantal thema verder uitgediept. Dit betreft onder andere de relatie mens-natuur, ideeën over tijd en plaats en thema's zoals compassie en zorg versus respect of angst. Het blijkt dat in de meeste verhalen de natuur gezien wordt als sterker dan de mens, en dat natuurrampen of milieudegradatie eerder gezien worden als een straf voor sociaal immoreel gedrag dan als een gevolg van onduurzaam omgaan van de mens met de natuur. Bovendien is er geen harde scheiding tussen mens en natuur, omdat er bijvoorbeeld geregeld transformaties van mensen in dieren plaatsvinden. Het thema angst en respect voor de natuur is zeer prominent aanwezig in lokale verhalen, terwijl het thema van zorg en compassie voor de natuur slechts in uitzonderlijke verhalen voorkomt. De omgeving zit vol met bovennatuurlijke krachten en wezens die wraak kunnen nemen in het geval de mens zich slecht gedraagt. Hieraan gekoppeld is het feit dat veel verhalen een morele les blijken te hebben waardoor tevens oude patronen in stand blijven. Dit is ongunstig voor een open dialoog. De Kameroenese filosoof Marcien Towa laat echter zien dat er in Kameroen ook verhalen bestaan die een actieve manier van denken stimuleren en ingaan tegen bestaande normen. Op deze typen verhalen zal ik later terugkomen wanneer ik ze gebruik als inspiratie voor de interculturele dialoog.

In het zevende hoofdstuk kijken we naar de supra-lokale visies, overtuigingen en ideeën met betrekking tot natuur en milieu. Ik beschouw ze in dit kader ook als 'verhalen' om ze te kunnen plaatsen als tegenhanger van de lokale verhalen. Het hoofdstuk is weliswaar minder uitgebreid dan de vorige hoofdstukken maar het behandelt een aantal typische voorbeelden uit de populaire boodschappen van natuurbeschermingsorganisaties. Hier zien we duidelijk twee thema's. De natuur is kwetsbaar, en de natuur staat voor schoonheid en harmonie. Veel van de verhalen zoals ze verteld worden door natuurbeschermers zijn versimpelde weergaven van een gecompliceerdere wetenschappelijke werkelijkheid en daardoor gevoelig voor mythevorming. Intussen zijn er met name vanuit de wetenschap alternatieve stromingen opgekomen die een aantal oude concepten en paradigma's in twijfel trekken. Dit neemt echter niet weg dat in het milieudebat deze 'oude' concepten nog steeds de boventoon voeren.

In het achtste hoofdstuk worden lokale en supra-lokale verhalen met elkaar vergeleken aan de hand van de vragen van Milton (zie tweede hoofdstuk) en de eerder genoemde thema's. Ondanks alle concrete verschillen blijkt dat beide verhaalwerelden het thema van angst gebruiken. In lokale verhalen werkt angst op basis van concreet direct gevaar vanuit de omgeving, bv. een straf voor immoreel handelen; uit supra-lokale verhalen spreekt de angst om iets kwetsbaars (de natuur) te verliezen dat we zo nodig hebben. Dit principe van angst is een sterke motivatie voor het in stand houden van gevestigde ideeën. Vervolgens wordt in dit hoofdstuk aandacht besteed aan wat er gebeurt als de twee verhalenwerelden elkaar ontmoeten in een dialoog. Hierbij spelen ook een aantal extra-narrative elementen een rol, met name het machtsverschil tussen lokale en supra-lokale instituties. De toenemende mondialisering brengt een onvermijdelijke mengeling van verhalen teweeg en een gevaar hierbij is dat het kan uitmonden in een soort nihilisme bij de lokale bevolking. Het voorzichtig omgaan met de omgeving op basis van traditionele angsten voor krachten uit die natuur verdwijnt langzaam, terwijl de achterliggende supra-lokale assumpties voor bescherming van een kwetsbare natuur nog niet eigen gemaakt zijn. Dit noem ik het 'beschermings-vaccuum'. Hier kom ik weer terug op de noodzaak dat er een open debat moet ontstaan waarbij iedereen actief en zelfstandig leert denken over problemen zoals die van het behoud van onze natuurlijke hulpbronnen. Het onderzoek van Marcien Towa (zie hoofdstuk zes) heeft aangetoond dat dit ook een onderdeel is van de lokale traditie en dit verdient dan ook extra aandacht.

In het negende hoofdstuk kom ik tot een praktische implementatie van de onderzoeksresultaten, namelijk voor het ontwerp van een concrete methode voor interculturele communicatie door middel van verhalen. Ik besteed allereerst weer aandacht aan de ethische risico's hiervan die met name aanwezig zijn wanneer je verhalen gebruikt

voor een top-down overdracht van informatie. Om deze te voorkomen grijp ik terug op de verhalen aangeduid door Marcien Towa om actief en open debat te stimuleren. Met name maak ik hier gebruik van de dilemma-verhalen: verhalen die geen eenduidige boodschap overbrengen maar eindigen met een open vraag en zo de luisteraars aanmoedigen tot actief nadenken tijdens een debat dat ingaat op de vraag die het verhaal stelt.. Het theoretisch deel van het hoofdstuk bouwt voort op een experiment met een dilemmaverhaal uitgevoerd door enkele onderzoekers een aantal jaren geleden in Kameroen. Op basis van dit experiment zijn een aantal lessen te leren. Het is met name zeer belangrijk het dilemma neutraal te verwoorden en beide partijen in het dilemma evenveel 'stemrecht' te geven. Een cruciale rol is weggelegd voor de verhalenverteller die tevens animator van het debat is. Wil de verhalenverteller succesvol zijn dan moet hij of zij een onpartijdige positie innemen en beide zijden van het dilemma kunnen verdedigen om zo de discussie scherp te houden. Tevens moet het dilemma niet te complex en dubbelzinnig zijn en teruggrijpen op de achterliggende assumpties zoals bijvoorbeeld verwoord in de vragen van Milton.
Op basis van de theorie behandelt het hoofdstuk vervolgens drie zelfbedachte dilemma verhalen die getest zijn in dertien dorpen in Kameroen. Uit deze experimenten blijkt dat de verhalen leidden tot zeer geanimeerde debatten waarbij vele verschillende argumentaties boven kwamen. Tevens bleken de debatten in een aantal gevallen te leiden tot het overstijgen van het dilemma en het zelfstandig vinden van alternatieve oplossingen. De debatten waren vermakelijk (entertainment) en leerzaam voor zowel de lokale luisteraars als de supra-lokale verteller (education).
Het hoofdstuk besluit met een voorlopig protocol van hoe in het algemeen verhalen te ontwerpen en verder te gebruiken voor nieuwe situaties die vragen om een interculturele dialoog.

Hoofdstuk 10 tenslotte geeft in het kort de belangrijkste vindingen van het onderzoek weer. Ik beperk mezelf hier niet alleen tot de wetenschappelijke analyse, maar ga ook in op wat dit in de praktijk betekent voor supra-lokale organisaties die zich bezighouden met natuurbescherming in ontwikkelingslanden. De methode is bij uitstek geschikt voor lokale NGO's omdat die doorgaans al veel van de cultuur van hun regio weten. Hierbij dient men zich bewust te zijn van de morele risico's. Deze kunnen verminderd door zich te houden aan een aantal principes zoals deze besproken zijn in hoofdstuk 9, onder andere de rol van de verhalenverteller als neutrale bemiddelaar van het debat en de keuze van een verhaal met een neutraal en eenduidig dilemma.

About the author

Natascha Zwaal was born on June 26, 1970 in Utrecht. In 1988 she received her VWO diploma of the Stella Maris College in Meerssen. In the same year she began her study Biology in Utrecht. In the third year of her study she began a second study Cultural Anthropology. These two studies were combined in two large fieldwork periods. The first one concerned a research on stingless bees and the role of bees in the Mayan culture in Yucatan, Mexico (ten months, 1990-1991). The second one concerned a research on elephant migration and human-elephant conflicts in the Far North of Cameroon (six months, 1993-1994).

In 1995 she graduated and from 1995-1996 she worked as a free lance journalist, consultant and tourist guide. She wrote a novel that was published in 1998. In 1996-1997 she carried out a research for WWF-Netherlands on stories for nature conservation in Cameroon. In 1997 she became the interim co-ordinator of the bilateral Cameroon-Netherlands program of WWF.

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