

LEARNING TO BE VEZO

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PERSON AMONG
FISHING PEOPLE OF WESTERN MADAGASCAR**

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation studies the Vezo, fishing people who live on the western coast of Madagascar. It examines Vezo identity and Vezo notions of personhood. These are shown to be construed around two apparently incompatible principles: the flexible principle of learning and the rigid principle of descent.

The first part of the dissertation discusses the fact that Vezoness is learnt, acquired and lost, and that people are rendered Vezo through learning and knowing Vezo knowledge. Ch.1 describes the knowledge that renders the Vezo Vezo and discusses how this knowledge is acquired. Ch.2 examines Vezo livelihood as one of the defining features of Vezo performative identity. Ch.3 treats Vezo political attitudes from a similar perspective. Ch.4 discusses some of the implications of defining identity on the basis of learning and practice, in particular the fact that although people are profoundly shaped by Vezoness, the latter does not become a permanent and essential characteristic of Vezo persons.

The second part of the dissertation analyzes Vezo kinship, contrasting kinship among the living with kinship among the dead. Ch.5 explains how people come to be related to one another in life through links of common

generation which are undifferentiated and ungendered. Ch.6 argues that unilineal descent only determines people's affiliation to a tomb. Descent is therefore a domain that concerns the dead, while the living are only shadowed by descent in anticipation and preparation of their death and burial. Chs.7 and 8 examine the ritual activities -- funerals and the construction of tombs -- through which the living imagine the existence of the dead and the latter's longing for life.

The Conclusion argues that the undifferentiation and flexibility of Vezoness and the divisiveness and fixity of descent rather than co-existing within the Vezo person, constitute two opposed realms of experience, life and death. Although separate and irreducible to one another, these two realms are nonetheless linked.

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INTRODUCTION

"WHAT RENDERS THE VEZO VEZO?"

When Solo, a boy of six, carries the steering paddle of his father's canoe on his shoulder, the sail ropes hanging coiled at the paddle's broad end, there is always someone around to tell him how "very Vezo" he is being. Conversely, when Jandroake briefly loses control of the canoe while sailing along the coast in a strong wind, causing the outrigger to tilt dangerously over the water, his companion chides him that he must have become a Masikoro -- the people of the interior who know how to raise cattle and grow manioc but who know nothing of the sea. Solo is becoming Vezo; Jandroake has momentarily lost his Vezoness.

The Vezo are people who live on the west coast of Madagascar. They live near the sea (andriaky), and they know the sea (mahay rano). In this dissertation I shall analyze their identity and ~~the~~ their notions of personhood.

In his seminal essay on the notion of person and self, Mauss (1985) indicated that this notion, like any other category of the human mind, cannot be assumed to be universal. Since then, anthropologists have reconstructed different models of personhood in different ethnographic contexts;¹ this study of the Vezo develops a further model. In what follows I analyze two aspects of Vezo identity, two components of their personhood. On the one hand, I discuss the fact that Vezoness is learnt, acquired and lost, and that people are rendered Vezo by learning and knowing Vezo knowledge -- this explains why Solo can be "very Vezo" while Jandroake becomes Masikoro. On the other hand, I show how this concept of Vezoness coexists with an entirely different principle, the principle of descent. As we shall see, the first aspect of Vezoness is emphatically non-Maussian: Vezo people, as it were, refuse to be defined by 'society'. Thus, unlike the Tallensi, the Vezo "are made aware of who and what they are as persons" (Fortes, 1973:281) with no reference to descent and status, to "moral, jural and ritual rules and observances and [to] special apparel and other distinctive possessions, corresponding to sex, age, rank, office, etc. (1973:279). However, the existence of the second principle, descent, appears to contradict and reverse the first one. The contrast and apparent incompatibility between these two features of Vezoness pose a major analytical challenge. This dissertation takes up the challenge, and attempts to make sense of the way in which

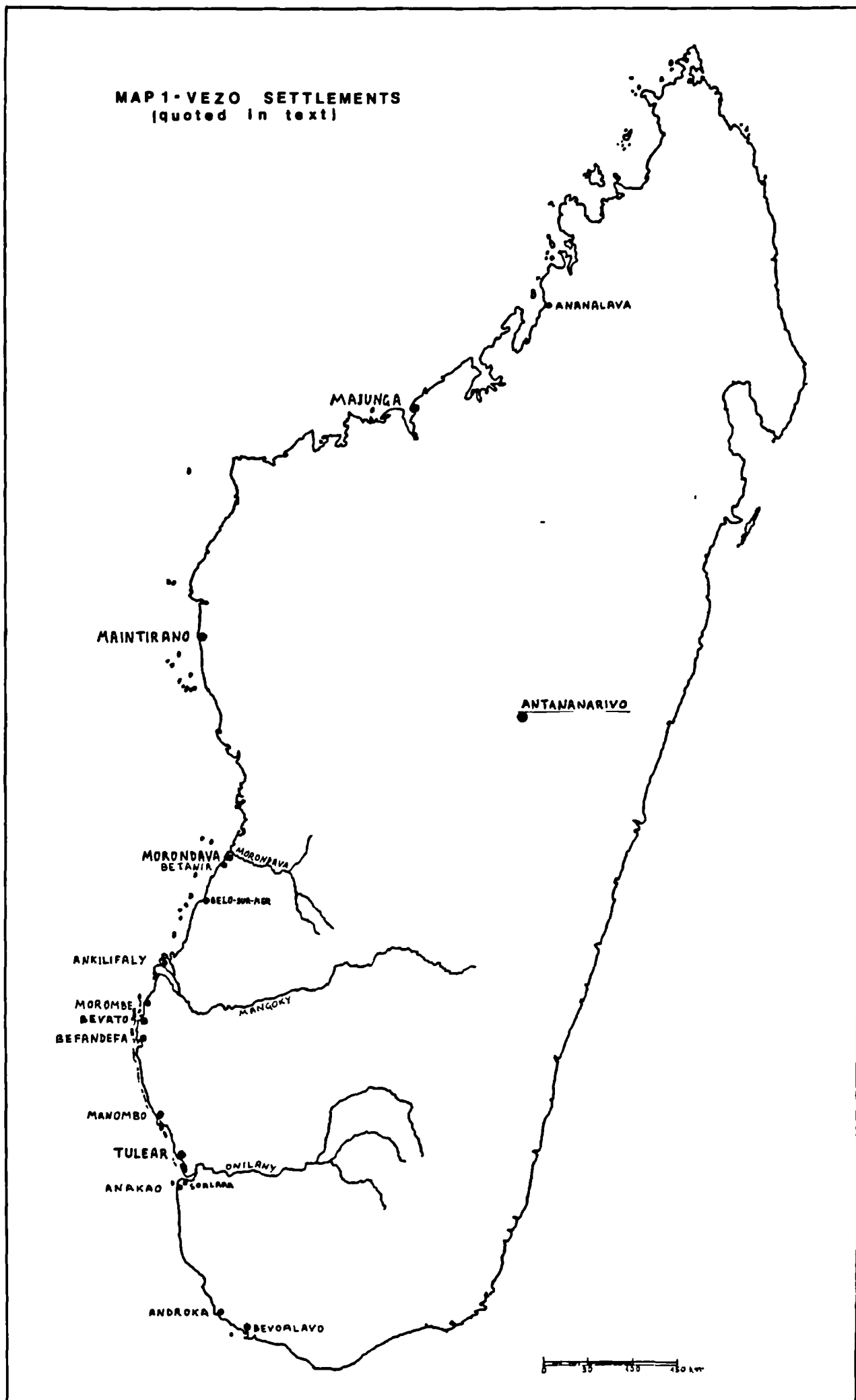
Vezo personhood is construed around the flexible principle of learning and the rigid principle of descent.

Let us begin by formulating the question that will engage us for the whole of this work: "what renders the Vezo Vezo?" (ino mahavezo ny Vezo?). I was taught this question as soon as I knew enough of the Vezo language to be able to ask it -- for the people I lived with were eager to explain what sort of people they are and what being a Vezo person means. As the dissertation will indicate, asking this question is the key to understanding what Vezoness is about. This question has never been asked in the literature that has dealt with the Vezo.

In the literature on western Madagascar one finds many references to the Vezo: by early western travellers who explored the region; by anthropologists who draw up lists of clans and ethnic groups, and by a few who provide systematic ethnographic studies; and by historians who reconstruct the conquest of the autochthonous groups by a foreign dynasty coming from the south-east of Madagascar, which resulted in the establishment of the Sakalava kingdoms.

From the start, one is struck by the lack of agreement on where the Vezo are located (see Map 1). Douliot (1893-96:234) described his trip along the coast from the Morondava river to Maintirano, during which he saw a number of Vezo villages. Petit (1930:206-213) referred

MAP 1-VEZO SETTLEMENTS
(quoted in text)



instead to the people living in this area as "le[s] pêcheur[s] du Nord-Ouest" (those living further north were "le[s] pêcheur[s] de Majunga"); he seems to have used the term Vezo only for the people who lived in the region of Tulear in the south. Similarly Faublée (1946:23) wrote about the northern people, who did some fishing but were mainly engaged in agricultural activities, and contrasted them with "les piroguiers du Sud [qui] vivent exclusivement de la pêche"; only the latter were Vezo. Dandouau and Chapus (1952:28) referred only to the Vezo of the Menabe, the Sakalava kingdom in the central area of the western region. In Deschamps' ethnic map (1960:295), Vezo settlements do not reach the northern region around Maintirano. Poirier (1953:23) indicated that some of the 49 clans present in the region of Analalava were Vezo, who in this region were also called Antandrano, "the people of the sea"; by contrast Baré (1980:134-146), writing about the northern Behimisatra kingdom immediately north of Analalava, distinguishes between the Antandrano of this region and "les groupes Vezo de la côte Sud-Ouest". According to Molet (1953:41-43), the Vezo inhabited the region between Morombe and Tulear, while Decary (1964:53-54) found that Vezo could be found between the Androka Bay and the Sakalava kingdom of Boina, and that their main settlement was Anakao. Grandidier thought that the Vezo could be found all along the western coast (for example Grandidier A. & Grandidier G. 1908-28, 1:214; Grandidier A. 1971:9), whereas Koechlin (1971:31) reported that the

Vezo were concentrated between Tulear and Morombe, but that they were also scattered along the coast from Bevoalavo in the south to Maintirano in the north. Finally, J.Poirier, editor of the ethnographic map of Madagascar in the official Atlas of Madagascar (Association 1969-70, fig.21), rather grudgingly recorded a small Vezo settlement around Tulear because "les Vezo sont recensés comme tels dans les statistiques", but he made clear that he did not believe in the ethnic specificity, or even in the existence, of this population.

If scholars disagree over the geographical location of the Vezo, they are united in describing the Vezo with reference to their mode of livelihood -- fishing -- and to the environment in which they carry out their productive activities -- the sea and the coast. Koechlin, the author of the most detailed study of the Vezo, defines them as "semi-nomades marins prédateurs de platiers coralliens, de mangrove et de zones forestières adjacentes à la côte" (Koechlin 1975:23). Other scholars have referred to the Vezo less technically as "des marins, des pêcheurs, vivant beaucoup sur la mer le long de la côte" (Grandidier A. 1971:9),² or as "des gens du littoral de la mer, praticiens de la navigation et de la pêche" (Poirier 1953:23).³

Agreement on the fact that the Vezo are fishing and coastal people may account paradoxically for disagreement on their geographical location, for consensus on the first issue masks two different readings of the statement that

"the Vezo are fishing people who live on the coast". Some authors seem to imply that any group of people engaged in fishing activities and dwells on the coast can thereby be defined as Vezo; others consider the fact that the Vezo are engaged in fishing activities simply as a description of their mode of livelihood, implying that fishing groups need not necessarily be Vezo.

The confusion in the literature on the Vezo seems to descend from the fact that the implications of defining or describing the Vezo through a technological label have never been seriously analyzed. In what follows, I present a selective review of the literature on the Vezo organized around two themes. The first theme concerns the meaning of the Vezo label; the second theme is the historical analysis of the formation of the Sakalava kingdoms. The two run separately in the literature. Ethnologists have discussed whether or not the Vezo are an ethnic group; historians have reconstructed the process of conquest and domination of a foreign aristocracy over autochthonous groups, one of which was the Vezo. By bringing together these two distinct approaches, we shall be able to see more clearly the crucial question that has yet to be asked about the Vezo.

Koechlin (1975:23-26) begins his book on the Vezo by explaining that because of the lack of studies in physical anthropology devoted to the populations of the west coast of Madagascar, he prefers to classify the various elements

of the population on the basis of their mode of livelihood (mode de vie). He then notes that this is the criterion that is actually employed by the various groups he identifies -- the Vezo (sea predators), the Masikoro (cultivators and cattle keepers), the Mikea (hunters and gatherers) and the Tanalana (slash-and-burn cultivators) - - to distinguish themselves, since each group differentiates itself from the rest on the basis of its activities rather than on the basis of its "physical traits". Koechlin's suggestion that "physical traits" fail to distinguish the various groups in western Madagascar is similar to the point made by other authors, that since anyone can become Vezo merely by taking up fishing or by moving to the coast, the term Vezo cannot indicate an ethnic group but must merely define an occupation or mode of livelihood.⁴

These scholars thus suggest that being Vezo only means to be "fishing people who live on the coast". The crucial implications of this finding, however, have not been recognized. There has been an implicit assumption that if the Vezo as such are not an ethnic group, they ought to have an alternative ethnic affiliation, like all other populations in Madagascar. Hence, the Vezo have been assigned to the Sakalava ethnic group, within which they represent a technologically-defined sub-group.⁵

This leads us to the second theme mentioned above. The meaning of the term Sakalava⁶ can be traced back to the history of the kingdoms of the west coast, a history of

conquest by a foreign dynasty coming out of the south-east that first penetrated the western regions around the sixteenth century. The Sakalava gradually pushed northwards through a series of regional conquests prompted by segmentation within the ruling group. As Rakotonirina notes, "le mot 'Sakalava', servant à désigner actuellement un groupe ethnique, résulte de la volonté maroseraña [the conquering dynasty] de perpétuer un règne" (quoted in Schlemmer 1983:89). For Schlemmer the term Sakalava is a political label, which implies conquest and assimilation into a political entity imposed by the Maroseraña conquerors on the autochthonous groups.⁷ To consider the Vezo as a technologically-defined variant within the Sakalava ethnic group is thus to suggest that the Vezo were one of the autochthonous groups that were integrated into the Sakalava kingdoms.

The Vezo are indeed generally regarded as one of the autochthonous groups of western Madagascar.⁸ But the literature on the history of the Sakalava kingdoms has placed great emphasis on the fact that conquest resulted in the imposition of animal husbandry as the dominant productive activity. From this perspective, the fact that the Vezo have an alternative system of production has been taken to indicate their marginality vis-à-vis the Sakalava system of political domination.

In his theoretical model of the Sakalava royalty and of its political development, Lombard argues that the Sakalava conquest caused a dramatic transformation in the

economic organization of the west coast, as animal husbandry became the dominant productive activity in a newly articulated and integrated economic system (1988: 70ff.). Schlemmer's analysis (1980, 1983) of the historical conditions that allowed the emergence of the kingdoms is somewhat less conjectural. For him, the key factor of domination was control over trade and the resulting monopoly over arms. But even though the imposition of animal husbandry as the dominant system of production was not the economic and political means through which Sakalava conquest was achieved and consolidated, Schlemmer nonetheless believes that it is the main sign of accomplished domination by the conquering group (1983:108-10). Significantly, Lombard's analysis ignores the Vezo, probably because he considers them to be one of "les groupes qui se trouvent à la 'périphérie' politique, sociale et économique de la royauté" and which he therefore is not concerned with (1988:77 n.1). Schlemmer (1983:96-7) argues instead that although the Vezo were subjected by the Sakalava, they were one of the minority groups that maintained systems of production in which animal husbandry did not play the dominant role.⁹ Nonetheless, Schlemmer suggests that even if the Vezo did not participate in the dominant, Sakalava mode of production, they nonetheless must have been dependent on it because "seul, le boeuf pouvait servir de monnaie d'échange thésaurisable" and because "seule, la possession d'un troupeau nombreux permettait une accumulation en

richesses et en prestige". Considering that Schlemmer provides no evidence that the Vezo did accumulate cattle and did participate in an exchange system in which cattle was its only transactable item,¹⁰ the main point of his analysis for our own purposes seems to be that the Vezo as fishing people were marginal to the economic and symbolic structures of the Sakalava kingdoms.

My aim here, however, is not to assess the role played by the Vezo within the Sakalava kingdoms. Rather, I wish to point out the paradox implicit in superimposing the Vezo and Sakalava labels. On the one hand, we have seen that the fact that the term Vezo refers to a mode of livelihood has prompted their inclusion within the Sakalava ethnic group; on the other hand, if we examine the historical and political meaning of the Sakalava label we find that the Vezo are viewed as marginal to the Sakalava group precisely by virtue of their mode of livelihood. Thus, having begun with the view that the Vezo are "fishing people who live on the coast" and having confronted the inconsistencies and contradictions of applying an ethnic tag to them, we seem to have come back to the view that what is crucial about the Vezo is indeed their mode of livelihood.

I suggested above that the literature keeps separate the themes of the meaning of the Vezo label and of the formation of the Sakalava kingdoms. There has been one instance, however, when the two strands have been brought

together in a historical analysis of the political and technological labels used on the west coast. What follows is a short digression on the historical transformation of the meaning of the term Masikoro, a transformation in which the Vezo played a significant role. In so doing, as we shall see, the Vezo provide a crucial clue as to how they construe their own identity.

As I explain in greater detail in the following chapters, the Vezo define the Masikoro as what the Vezo are not: first and foremost, the Masikoro are the people who live in the interior and are engaged in agricultural activities. In his work on the Masikoro of Bekoropoka, however, Lavondès noted a regional variation in the use of the Vezo/Masikoro antinomy. He reported that whereas to the north of the Mangoky river people "se classent comme Vezo ou comme Masikoro, selon leur activité", in the southern area between the Mangoky delta and the Onilahy river "la distribution entre Vezo et Masikoro correspond à une distinction ethnique" (1967:22). Lavondès explained that while in the north people defined themselves primarily as Sakalava and used the terms Vezo or Masikoro to indicate their mode of livelihood, in the south people did not regard themselves as Sakalava, but rather as Vezo or Masikoro.¹¹

To account for this difference, Lavondès referred to Birkeli's (1926) reconstruction of the history of the clans of the west coast. Birkeli argued that the term Masikoro denoted both a specific mode of livelihood and a

purely political entity, defined territorially as the area between the Mangoky and the Onilahy rivers which was conquered and ruled by the Andrivola dynasty. As subjects of the Andrivola, the Masikoro were a separate and adjacent group vis-à-vis the Sakalava, who were subjected instead to the Maroseraña (a separate branch of the Andrivola dynasty). Birkeli suggested a chronological (and possibly logical) priority of the political over the technological meaning of the term Masikoro:

l'histoire de ce mot [masikoro] est des plus intéressantes. Les indigènes ont complètement oublié l'origine du mot, en dépit de l'usage très fréquent qu'ils en font. Ce mot signifie maintenant un 'paysan', et s'emploie quand on veut opposer l'homme de terre ou marin: 'vezo'. Il a reçu la même universalité que le mot 'sakalava' et a été introduit au nord où il n'y avait pas des masikoro proprement dits (1926:49).

Whereas the term Masikoro spread to the north and in the process changed its original meaning, the term Sakalava spread to the south where it began to be employed to define what had been the kingdom of the Masikoro: "maintenant tous sont devenus sakalaves, ainsi que tous les hommes de terre sont devenus masikoro" (Birkeli 1926:50).

Oral traditions collected by Birkeli account for this semantic transformation of the term Masikoro. The Masikoro

venaient du Sud et le pays de la majorité d'entre eux était connu sous le nom de masikoro. Cette appellation se fixa, et c'est le nom que les vezo emploient jusqu'aujourd'hui pour distinguer les gens de l'intérieur. Bien que la population du nord ne soit pas 'masikoro', les vezo, étant des voyageurs, appliquaient partout le nom. Ainsi, masikoro est devenue le synonyme de paysan qui cultive la terre (Birkeli 1922-23:370, also quoted in Lavondès 1967:22).¹²

In Birkeli's historical reconstruction, the Vezo are held responsible for transforming the meaning of the term Masikoro. The Vezo appear to have ignored (and thus, presumably, to have been unaffected by) the political content of the Masikoro label, and to have employed it instead as if it denoted "being a peasant" -- as if what mattered for both Vezo and Masikoro was their respective mode of livelihood rather than their political affiliation. Whether the Masikoro are, or were, a politically-defined entity or not, the Vezo appear to have successfully imposed a purely technological label on them.¹³

We have seen that scholars like Koechlin have assumed that if the Vezo label does not define a distinct ethnic

group, the Vezo must belong to another ethnic group, the Sakalava. However, the way in which the Vezo manipulated the term Masikoro, which was originally a political and ethnic term analogous to 'Sakalava', by transforming it into a technological label, suggests that for the Vezo the mode of livelihood is people's most significant attribute. In other words, this terminological transformation suggests that the main, or only criterion by which the Vezo define themselves is their mode of livelihood. We have also seen that because of their productive specialization the Vezo are peripheral to the history of the Sakalava kingdoms, whose subjects specialized in animal husbandry. On these two counts, we might contemplate the possibility that the Vezo do not belong to the Sakalava (or any other) ethnic group, and that their mode of livelihood is sufficient to define and constitute their identity. To take this step, as we shall see, raises new and more interesting questions about the Vezo themselves.

Let me begin by explaining what I mean by stating that the Vezo's mode of livelihood may be a sufficient criterion to define their identity. When I asked people what kind of person they were, they answered that they were Vezo; by way of explanation, they told me that the Vezo are "people who fight the sea and who live on the coast" (olo mitolo rano, olo mipetsaky andriaky). This was the only definition they were prepared to give of themselves. The

significance of this fact becomes apparent if for example we contrast the Vezo with the Merina of central Madagascar. Although the Merina are highland rice-cultivators, we know that they are construed and recognized as Merina not through what they do and where they live, but through kinship and ancestorhood and through political and territorial criteria (Bloch 1971). Similarly, however culturally important the fact that they are coal-miners is for the people of Barnsley, the fact remains that they are also British. Neither for the Merina nor for the miners of Barnsley is their occupation sufficient to define their group or personal identity.

By contrast, when the Vezo say that being Vezo is to be "people who fight the sea and live on the coast", they mean precisely that: to be such is the only thing that defines who and what they are. They emphatically refuse to adopt any other, higher-level defining categories such as the political criterion that defines the Sakalava group (see below, ch.3) -- rather as if a Bransley miner refused to call himself British. They also (see below, ch.6) emphatically refuse to define themselves through lower-level categories like descent groups -- rather as if a Merina refused to define himself through his link with a particular tomb and ancestral land.

The basic concept that the Vezo wanted me to understand, which was emphasized again and again with me and my visitors, was summed up in this statement: "the Vezo are not a kind of people" (Vezo tsy karazan'olo). The

word karaza means 'kind', type, and indicates groups of objects, animals or people that share some essential characteristic (see also Bloch 1971:42-3). For example, fish (fia) is a 'kind' of living thing, and Spanish mackerel is a 'kind' of fish (lamatsa ro karazam-pia). The word raza, from which karaza derives, refers in turn to the ancestors, and in particular to the ancestors of a certain 'kind', those who constitute a specific unilineal descent group that is also called raza (see below, ch.6).

Membership of a karaza/raza, whether of a class of objects, animals or people, is based on intrinsic rather than acquired qualities. Neither 'fishness', nor a specific kind of 'fishness' can neither be acquired, learnt or changed. Similarly, a human being does not acquire, or learn, membership of a particular raza, but obtains it through descent. Consequently, the statement that "the Vezo are not a kind of people" is meant to signify that the Vezo are not 'inherently' such.

Let us return to Solo and Jandroake, with whom I began these pages. Solo is "very Vezo" (vezo mare) when he carries his father's steering paddle; Jandroake becomes Masikoro when he makes a mistake in sailing his canoe. In both cases, to be or not to be Vezo depends on performance; nothing of what Solo and Jandroake are is inherently Vezo. Thus, the correct question to be asked about Solo's and Jandroake's identity, and about the identity of all Vezo people, is not whether they are Vezo, but rather "what renders the Vezo Vezo?" (ino mahavezo ny

Vezo?). As I mentioned above, I was taught to ask this question, which is considered the most effective way to learn about the Vezo and about Vezoness.

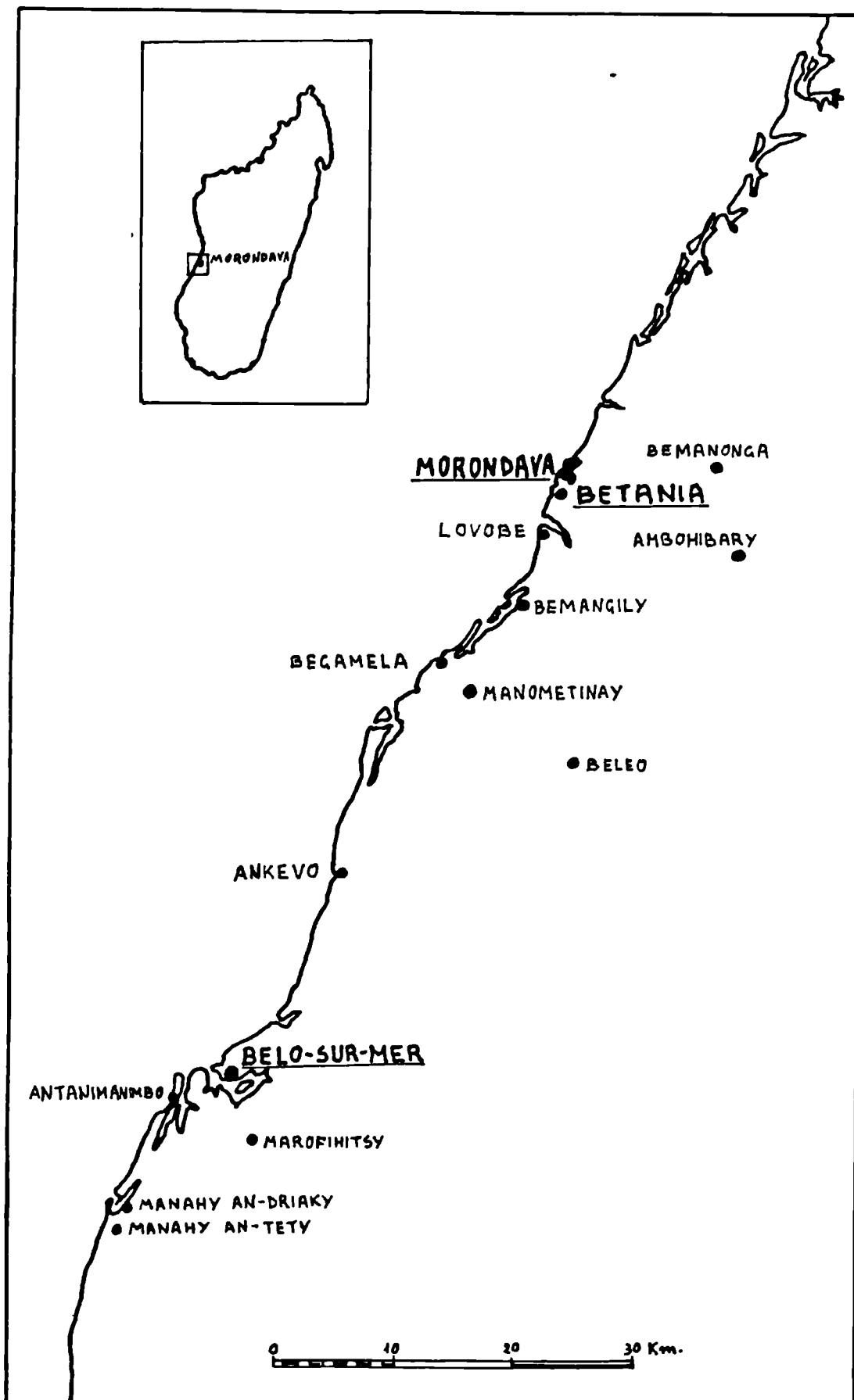
Hence, the following questions can be asked about Vezoness: what does it consist of? If it is not an inherent trait, how do Vezo people come to obtain it? Can it be lost as well as acquired? How does it affect people, and does it transform them? Can it be recognized, and if so how? If what makes the Vezo Vezo is neither inherent nor permanent -- "the Vezo are not a kind of people" -- we might say provisionally, if somewhat tautologically, that it is Vezoness that makes them such. However, this statement is less obvious than it might seem, for Vezoness is distinct from the Vezo. Vezoness is the object of this study.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. In the first part I examine the various aspects of Vezoness. I show how men, women and children do Vezo things in Vezo ways and thereby 'construct' themselves as Vezo people. I discuss the contextuality of Vezoness, the fact that people become Vezo through a process of learning, and that they are made Vezo by actually performing Vezo activities. In the second part I address what I suggested above appears to be a major contradiction with the concept of Vezoness I have outlined, namely that the Vezo, who are not "a kind of people", are nonetheless divided into "kinds of people" through patrilineal descent groups (raza).

I spent my fieldwork among the Vezo (November 1987-June 1989) living in two Vezo villages: Betania and Belo-sur-mer (Belo for short; see Map 2). Morondava, the main town in the area, which includes governmental offices, a market, a hospital, a post office and an airport, lies about 3km north of Betania. Belo, which lies 60km south of Morondava, can be reached from Morondava for most of the year only by sea. I estimated the adult population of Betania at the time of my stay at 335; I was told by the village head (prezidan'fokonolo) in Belo that the village numbered about 800 inhabitants.

Although I had originally planned to move to Belo shortly after arriving in Betania, I actually spent most of my time in the latter; part of this time I spent wondering whether to go to Belo at all, for I soon realized that my work in Betania was too valuable to leave it lightheartedly. In Betania, I was adopted within the kinship network of the man whose house I rented. Within this network, which included eight households, I could join any conversation, meeting, argument, gossip, fight, joke, whispering, laughing or crying I wished to be part of. I could ask questions and require explanations. Although some people were remarkably better than others in providing answers I could understand, people generally seemed very much at ease with the idea that I was interested in learning about them and were very committed to teaching me what to learn and how.

MAP 2 - AREA OF FIELDWORK



Outside this close kinship network, I soon got on familiar terms with a number of other households, where I could ask questions freely and provoke discussions on topics I was interested in. Although I sometimes made formal interviews, I found it more useful to participate in conversations and activities I had not initiated myself. Nonetheless, even though I could visit these households informally whenever I wanted to, I lacked the intimacy I had with my adoptive family. At times this greater formality was compensated by the fact that for more distant people I was a special kind of outsider to be treated with special attention. Thus, I was allowed or even encouraged to watch certain rituals from a privileged viewpoint. Within my adoptive family, by contrast, I lost these sorts of privileges very soon, once my daily presence became a matter of fact and was taken for granted. Other villagers, however, remained distant throughout my stay. Some I felt did not like me; some I found it hard to like. Others were indifferent towards me, or uninteresting to talk with. Yet even these people I had some degree of familiarity with, since we lived in the same village and shared many important activities, like attending funerals and the Morondava market. Finally, there were those I could neither talk with or exchange greetings, for by becoming part of one kinship network I was forced to adopt all my kin's hatreds and enmities.

When I finally arrived in Belo after more than a year in Betania, I was regarded as a "visitor" (vahiny) from Betania. I was accompanied by a woman who had married into my family in Betania and whose old father lived in Belo. I was considered her daughter and her father's granddaughter, and I was integrated accordingly into their vast local kinship network. Except for my adoptive grandfather and a few others, however, relations in Belo were more formal than in Betania, partly because I spent far less time there, and partly because I had reached a point in my research where I wanted to ask questions on very specific points. I was therefore much more selective in my contacts than I had been in Betania. I made a large number of structured interviews and I visited people on the basis of some specific information I hoped to get from them, rather than according to the strategy of social integration I had followed in Betania.

While living in Betania and Belo I spent short spells of time in other nearby Vezo villages: Lovobe, Bemangily, Ankevo, Begamela, Antanimanimbo, Manahy an-driaky. I also visited some Masikoro villages in the interior: Ambohibary, Manometinay, Beleo, Marofihitsy, Manahy antety. While living in Betania I frequented the market in Morondava, where I met women from many Vezo villages north and south of Morondava. I also became friendly with a well-known family of Vezo origin, who have considerable political influence in Madagascar; many of its members now live in large towns elsewhere in the country and some

study and work abroad. Talking to those who still live in Morondava taught me a great deal about the flexible boundaries between Vezoness and non-Vezoness.

This dissertation is based on an extensive use of my fieldnotes. Since I often quote informants' statements as I recorded them in my notes, it is necessary to say something about how I wrote them down. I took notes from the first day I arrived in Betania when I hardly knew a word of Vezo. At first I wrote down simple descriptions of what people did, how they dressed, sat, moved or laughed. As my linguistic abilities improved, I was able to incorporate more and more of what people said in my notes; I wrote down bits of sentences or expressions that seemed to recur and were easy to remember; sometimes I could ask people to repeat what they or others had said and I wrote it down in full. But mostly I paraphrased conversations, choosing specific points I found more interesting or reporting explanations I asked for or that were volunteered. Because of the informal way I met, talked or listened to people, I made very little use of a tape-recorder. Nonetheless, the few transcriptions I have and which I use extensively in the dissertation include particularly effective statements that express crucial aspects of Vezoness.

Both in Betania and in Belo I was able to participate in almost all the activities I wished. The most significant exception was that I was not allowed to go into the forest to observe the first stage in the

construction of canoes. Although women rarely join in this undertaking, the reason I was not taken was not my gender but the inconvenience of having me around while working in a hostile and unfamiliar environment (see below, ch.1). More generally, I never felt that my gender or age significantly affected the information or activities I had access to. A far more determining factor was the intimacy that grew between me and my foster kin, an intimacy that required as much commitment and loyalty on my part as on theirs.

Notes. Introduction

1. For example, Geertz (1973) shows that the Balinese are "depersonalized", for people are placed in a particular location within an eternal metaphysical order: persons in Bali are sets of roles in an unperishing present. Shore (1982) argues that the Samoan person is "many-faceted", and that different facets are isolated and activated in any particular social context; as "many-faceted gems", Samoans have no notion of a whole, integrated person. Rosaldo (1980) analyzes Ilongot personhood through the medium of emotions, "knowledge" and "passion", which refer respectively to a state of sociality and one of opposition and withdrawal, to civility and unrestrained vitality, to cooperative life and disruptive force: the Ilongots' "heart" dialectically combines both emotions as complementary aspects of life. For Melanesia, Starthern (1990) has elaborated a model of partible persons who are continuously constructed and reconstructed through gift exchange, whereby objects circulate as parts of persons to create relations between persons. Rivière (1984) describes the Guiana Indian as "rampant individualists" in the context of an analysis of the atomistic nature of Amerindian social organization. In India Dumont (1980) finds that the encompassing ideology of hierarchy denies individuality, every unit being simultaneously one and many. Marriott (1976) argues instead that the distinctive trait in the Indian conceptualization of the person is monism, that is the lack of distinction between body and soul; persons are in a continuous state of transformation, for their actions change and recombine their malleable substance. Parry (1989) argues instead for a dialectical interpretation of two coexisting ideological strands, in which the protean representation of the person sustains and reinforces the static ideology of caste.

2. See also Grandidier A. & Grandidier G. 1908-28, i:241 n.2, where the author notes that the word 'vezo' means 'the people who paddle'. This etymology was often used by my informants to explain what the term Vezo means. Vezo is the imperative of mive, which means 'to paddle;' when a team on a canoe is paddling, one person beats the rhythm for the others by chanting 've-zo! ve-zo!' (in fact, I saw this being done only by children 'paddling' inside a broken canoe half buried in the sand). See also Poirier 1953:23; Faublée 1946:23; Faublée M. & Faublée J. 1950:432; Koechlin 1975:51. Although this etymology may not be correct, it is nonetheless significant for being employed by the Vezo to link Vezoness to the canoe and activities in the sea.

3. Virtually all the authors who mention the Vezo define them as fishing people who live on the coast. See Walen 1881-84:7, 12-13; Douliot 1893-6:119, 245; Marcuse 1914:39, 172; Petit 1930:26-7; Faublée 1946:23; Faublée M. & Faublée J. 1950:432-3; Dandouau and Chapus 1952:28; Battistini and Frère 1958:10; Condominas 1959:4-5; Deshamps 1960:153; Angot 1961:142, 145; Ottino 1963:279; Decary 1964:36 note 2, 53-4; Fauroux 1980:82. The only exception seems to be Noël 1843-4.

4. See e.g. Grandidier A. & Grandidier G. 1908-28, 1:214 n.2; Douliot 1893-96:119; Decary 1964:36, 53-4; in Association 1969-70, fig.21, J.Poirier not only denies that the Vezo are an ethnic group, but argues also that the term Vezo is meaningless even as a label for a "mode de vie", for there is no uniformity in what the Vezo do to provide for their subsistence.

5. See e.g. Koechlin 1975:26, who deduces from the fact that the Vezo do not differ 'racially' from the Mikea, the Masikoro, the Tanalana etc. that they must belong to "la grande famille ethnique sakalava".

6. I discuss the distinction between Sakalava and Masikoro below.

7. "S'il existe aujourd'hui une 'ethnie' sakalava, c'est en effet dans la mesure où les dynasties conquérantes (...) surent imposer à tous leurs sujets leur vision du monde, surent s'assimiler les diverses formations sociales qui existaient avant leur avènement sur l'étendue des royaumes qu'elles se conquièrent" (Schlemmer 1983:89).

8. See Birkeli 1926:36-7; Poirier 1953:23; Kent 1970:169-70; Battistini and Verin 1971; Ottino 1974; Association 1969-70, fig. 19; Verin 1980; Hoerner 1986.

9. See also Fanony 1986:133.

10. In fact, Schlemmer (1983:97) mentions that the various groups bartered their specialized products without using cattle as a medium.

11. On the Masikoro/Sakalava distinction see also Dina 1982.

12. In fact, the terminology is even more complex than this quotation suggests. The region which Birkeli indicated with the term Masikoro used in its original, political sense, is also referred to in the literature as Fiheregna or Fiherenana. Esoavelomandroso (1981:177) defines the Fiheregna as the province lying between the Mangoky and the Onilahy rivers, inhabited by the Masikoro and ruled by the Andrivola dynasty. See also Douliot 1893-6:145, who reported that he was unable to travel in Fiheregna because the Sakalava accompanying him refused to enter a region that was unknown to them.

13. Birkeli (1926:49) noted that "sakalava et masikoro sont originellement une désignation de localité, mais tous les deux sont devenues désignation de qualité".

CHAPTER 1

LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

... you can't yet say that small children are Vezo, you can say that they are a little Vezo (...). These children you see, their school is there in the water. They learn how to swim; when they have worked on learning how to swim, when they have learnt and know how to swim, when they are not afraid of the water, then you can say that they are Vezo.¹

Let us take for example a Masikoro who comes from the interior to live here in Betania, and then he marries here. He observes people's livelihood: there are no rice fields, people only go fishing, they only have fishing nets and only go out to sea. After all this, his brothers- or father-in-law might take him out fishing. There he is, his mind works hard: this is how one does this, this is how this other thing works! Yet his forefathers did not know about these things. He goes out again with his friends,

and so on and so on, until in the end he knows: he becomes Vezo.²

You, when you arrived here, people said: "Ha! this lady [madame] often goes out fishing", and now I say: "Haven't you become Vezo?" and yet you are a vazaha [a white] from far away. But if you go fishing every day here: "Ha! that lady is Vezo!" because you fight the sea, because you paddle the canoe, and you are Vezo.³

This chapter is about learning and knowing how to swim, to build canoes, to sail, to fish, to cook, eat and sell fish. The aim of what follows is not to prove the obvious, namely that people whose livelihood depends on the sea know how to exploit the latter skilfully. The point I want to make is more substantial. If children are not born Vezo, but learn to be Vezo, and if strangers whose forefathers knew nothing about the sea, or someone as alien as me, a white, can become Vezo, this means that Vezoness can be learnt and is learnt by children and adults alike (mianatsy havezoa). If this is so, Vezoness cannot be intrinsic to people, but must be contextual -- one must be able to acquire it and consequently also lose it. To be acquired, Vezoness must be learnt. The knowledge that I describe in this chapter is thus part of what renders the Vezo Vezo.

I use the word 'knowledge' where I could use, more simply, the term 'skills'. The reason I do so is that the people I describe do not simply possess skills, but have developed a declaratory discourse about them which includes a rhetorical emphasis on learning and knowing. The Vezo construct learning as a process of self-definition and they display their knowledge and their Vezoness. Rhetoric and assertiveness, however, are grounded in what people experience in the actual process of learning and in the activities in which their knowledge is employed and manifested. In what follows I try to convey what is involved in knowing to be Vezo.

For ease of exposition, I divide Vezo knowledge into distinct items; this itemization also reflects the fact that to be Vezo people need not know everything at once. We shouldn't think of the knowledge that makes the Vezo Vezo in formalistic terms; it is not a matter of struggling through a curriculum each of whose elements is a necessary but insufficient condition to be Vezo. To master any part of Vezo knowledge is enough for people to be considered Vezo. Thus, the apparently restrictive claim that Vezo knowledge is an exclusive prerogative of the Vezo, signifies that anyone who possesses even a part of this knowledge is thereby rendered Vezo (see below, ch.4).

swimming

The first intelligible conversation I had in Betania was about swimming. I wanted to find out whether I could swim

in the ocean, and I was told that I could. When people saw me swimming, they told me that I was Vezo: they meant this literally, because for them my swiftness in the water made me Vezo. When I asked two young boys if they knew how to swim, they smiled for having to say the obvious, that they know how to swim because all the Vezo know how. In another context, I was told that "the Merina do not know how to swim because they are very Masikoro" (Ambaniandro tsy mahay mandaño, satsia Masikoro mare rozy). Nonetheless, if a Merina or a Masikoro can swim, she is Vezo.

Children (boys and girls alike) learn how to swim (mianatsy mandaño) by playing in the shallows close to the shore. They are never taught how to swim;⁴ they just learn by trial and error. These water games give rise to considerable apprehension in adults (especially in women), who fear that the smaller children might drown. Children are also often scolded for playing in the sea because they ruin their clothes with the sea-salt. Despite this, children are expected to learn how to swim, for this is a necessary requisite for safe sailing and fishing, and they are told that they will not be taken out fishing or on other exciting sea expeditions until they know how to swim.

Although it is taken for granted that the ability to swim goes together with being Vezo, the fact that some people are unable to swim does not necessarily compromise their Vezoness. Once, when a storm at seas put the canoe I was in in great peril, I discovered with shock that one

of the women on our canoe could not swim. This had never been mentioned before, and indeed I had seen this woman act with great ability on previous sailing expeditions, by leaning over one of the booms, way out over the water, to keep the canoe in balance. She later explained that the reason she cannot swim is that as a child she was raised with her mother in a Masikoro village in the interior. When she later went to live with her father in a Vezo village she was already too old to play with smaller children, and she thus missed her chance of learning how to swim. Nonetheless, she learnt many other Vezo tasks; by performing these she behaved as if she also knew how to swim. Rather proudly, she recalled how she was once on a canoe that capsized, and how she saved herself by catching hold of the outrigger, and crawling on top of the hull. This woman is as much a Vezo as anyone else. Her inability to swim has not interfered with her becoming Vezo -- despite the potential danger, and at times the actual fear, of being a Vezo who does not know how to swim.

Fañolana's story is somewhat different. A young man who moved to Betania a few years ago, he was born in the south, near Tsiombé. He is Antandroy. He came to Morondava to look for wage employment, and he has been on and off various jobs in the area. He was welcomed on his arrival in Betania by his relatives (longo), the descendants of three brothers who came from Antandroy country, settled in Betania and became Vezo. When Fañolana first arrived, he was very impressed by the huge fish that his relatives

caught and sold daily at the market, and by the money they earned. He is convinced that he would be better off fishing, rather than being a night-guard in Morondava for a small salary (see below, ch.2); however, he "does not know the sea" (tsy mahay rano), and he thinks that learning its skills is very hard (mahery mianatsy rano, lit. to learn the sea is difficult). Fañolana's main problem, I was told by one of his Vezo relatives, is that he cannot swim (i mahavao azy tsy mahay mandaño). For the rest, he managed well: he has learnt the names of the different parts of the canoe and the names for the various sail and rope positions, and he would probably know how to tie the sail ropes correctly when ordered to do so. Every morning Fañolana goes to the beach to help his Vezo relatives set out fishing, and he helps them tidy up the canoe when they come back. Yet, when I asked Fañolana whether he would like to learn more, he replied: "I would like, but I am too afraid" (ta hianatsy, nefa mavoso).

Fañolana is too old to learn how to swim. But I suspect that he will eventually overcome his fear and will be taken out fishing; he will then prove that, however difficult, he can learn the ways of the sea. His friends will undoubtedly be supportive of his attempts and will be excited by his successes in becoming Vezo.

canoes

The canoes used by the Vezo are dug out of the trunk of a tree called farafatse (Givotia madagascariensis). Once the

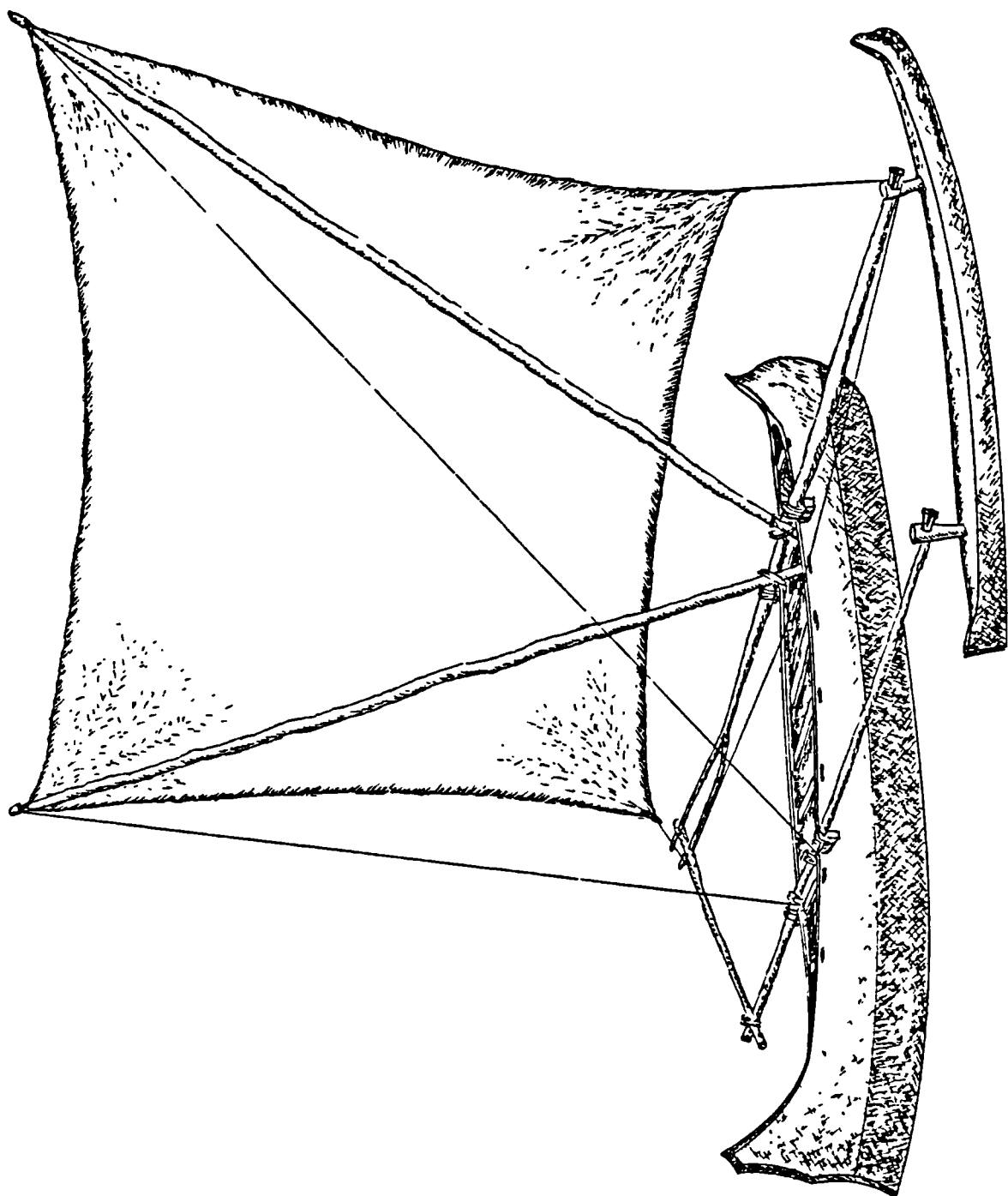
wood has been left to dry for a few weeks, it becomes soft, light and extremely supple. There are two types of canoes that are made with the same tree: the outrigger canoe, laka fihara,⁵ and the canoe without the outrigger, laka molanga.⁶ The first type is commonly referred to as laka, the second type as molanga.

The first task in constructing a canoe is to fell a tree and carve out the trunk (mivan-daka); what emerges as a hull is called roka. Once the wood has dried out, the roka is transported to the village. If the roka is for a molanga, there is little further to be done on it; if it is needed for a laka, a second major operation takes place (miasa laka).

The tree that is chosen, will depend on the type of canoe that must be built (a laka or a molanga) and depending on its size. First of all the height and the circumference of the tree must be evaluated, not an easy task in a very dense forest;⁷ the trunk is also checked to see that there are no knots in the wood. Once the tree has been chosen, the area around it must be cleared so that the trunk finds no obstacles on its way to the ground. If in the fall the trunk breaks it is abandoned, and the search starts afresh. If the trunk falls without breaking, it is dug out immediately. The branches are chopped off, and slowly the bow, the stern and the hull begin to take shape.⁸

Once the roka reaches the village it is made into a molanga or a laka. In the first case, it is only a matter

FIG.1-THE LAKA



of planing down and shaping the hull. But if a laka is being built, there is still much work to be done. First, the sides of the hull must be extended in height by fitting onto the roka planks of farafatse taken from an old canoe.⁹ To avoid leakage at the joints, the planks and the roka must achieve a perfect fit; long wooden nails are used to join the parts together. Once the sides of the canoe are the required height, they are evened out all around and the edge is flattened. Then the hull's inner surface is smoothed out, and any unevenness at the point of juncture between the roka and the planks is removed. The supports for the booms and the seats are then fitted into the hull. A wooden rail, divided into six long pieces, is forced into shape and nailed onto the edge of the hull; this frame helps keep the seats and boom-holders in place, and partly counteracts the extreme flexibility of the hull. The next step is to plane down and give shape to the outer surface of the hull. The shape of the bow line is given particular attention, because the result will significantly affect the canoe's speed and stability at sea. Once the hull is ready, its bottom part is waterproofed with tar. If any extra cash is available, the canoe's upper part may be painted with commercial paint, which also protects the wood. Once tar and paint have dried, the hull is ready to be assembled with the booms and the outrigger, and the canoe can be rigged and set sail.¹⁰

The operations undertaken in the forest are considered very difficult (sarosty mare). Although the roka is not a proper canoe yet (mbo tsy azo atao laka), it is the first carving out the trunk that makes it into a canoe (mahalaka azy), for it gives the canoe-to-be its structure and shape. Consequently, the transformation of a trunk into a roka is regarded as the most difficult step in the building of a canoe.¹¹

Things are made harder by the environment in which the Vezo undertake this work. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the only time I was not allowed to learn about Vezo techniques or customs was when I asked to join a group of men who were going to build a roka in the forest. The reason for the refusal was not, as I first imagined, that women are banned (falin' ampela) from joining in this activity; Vezo women do accompany men into the forest, although this is done neither often nor apparently with great eagerness on the women's part. Women are not expected to make canoes, for "it is not a woman's job" (tsy asan'ampela); yet this does not mean that they are prevented from knowing the details of the job (see below, ch.4). When the men returned from the forest, they made considerable efforts to put into words what they had done; they were fully committed to teaching me all they could about canoe-making. But they also described the huge wasps which came in swarms and attacked them; they talked about their fear at night at hearing wild dogs rummaging about; they showed me mosquito bites all over their

bodies; they told me how they longed to have a good night's sleep, lying on soft sand rather than on the hard and cold earth of the interior. They were clearly trying to prove that, had I accompanied them, I would have been miserable and that my presence would have made their work even harder. Yet, they were also formulating a perception of the forest as an alien environment, in which the Vezo find it difficult to move, to work or to sleep.

The remoteness of the forest makes learning how to carve the roka less accessible than learning how to transform a roka into a proper canoe,¹² and it is possibly for this reason that the former is considered to be more difficult -- that is, less easily learned -- than the latter. When a canoe is being built at the village, people come by, sit around, watch and make comments on technical aspects of the work. Most notably, children are encouraged to attempt a few of the easier tasks, and will shape small decorative parts and to join them to the bow and the stern of the canoe. Since the techniques used to assemble these smaller wooden pieces are the same as those used for building the hull, young children get some useful experience, while they visibly enjoy the aesthetic aspects of their task.

The chunks of farafatse that are discarded after joining the side planks to the roka are used by children to make little toy canoes, which are often detailed copies of the real one under construction. The work involved in

making these toys is said to be the first important learning experience in canoe-building.

Like swimming, building canoes is one of the things that makes the Vezo Vezo; the following example is meant to show what this may actually mean. Once, when I was in Belo, I asked Gramera to accompany me to Marofihitse, a nearby Masikoro village. I had heard that Gramera's blood-brother (fatidra) was very skilful in making the roka, and I wanted to commission him one for a canoe I wanted give to my adoptive mother in Betania. The two men did most of the talking. First the usual light conversation about people's health, the weather and the oddity of my presence for people who had never met me before. Soon, however, they moved on to real business. Gramera asked whether there were still farafatse in the area, and whether there was one large enough for a canoe of such and such a size. The tone of the conversation changed abruptly; the two men started to talk shop. Of the two, the man from Marofihitse struck me as being the expert. He gave details of the quality of various trees he had seen, and carefully discribed the shape of a roka he had recently built, which he heard had turned into one of the fastest canoes in the area. He was showing off, but he was doing so very knowledgeably. Finally, he agreed to build the roka I wanted.

This man lives in the interior, where he cultivates maize and manioc. He does not fish. Rather apologetically,

he explained to me that he is "rendered Masikoro" (maha-masikoro anakahy) by the fact that his mother used to cultivate in the interior and that, as a result, he ended up living there also. He admitted that he was becoming more and more Masikoro, the proof being that he cannot sail a canoe from Belo to Morondava (mihamasikoro mare aho, tsy mahay milay laka ho avy a Morondava ahy). But when I asked him whether the Masikoro know how to fell a farafatse and build a canoe, he replied that the Masikoro are only good for hunting tenrecs, and that if they try to build a canoe, their result is a "cattle's canoe" (lakan'aomby) -- in other words, a cattle trough.¹³

Insofar as this man knows how to build canoes, he is not Masikoro. On the contrary, since his roka produce canoes that go faster than any others, he is described as "very Vezo" (Vezo mare ie). The existence of a Masikoro who knows how to make canoes produces, as it were, a contradiction in the Vezo scheme of things, like the man I have described who is both Masikoro and Vezo at the same time. His example, however, indicates the strength of the notion that Vezo people are rendered such through learning and knowing. This man's Vezoness is contextual, rather than inherent or essential, for it is created through practice and knowledge. He possesses only a small part of the knowledge that makes people Vezo, while for the most part he knows and performs what makes people Masikoro; when he says that he is becoming more and more Masikoro, he is

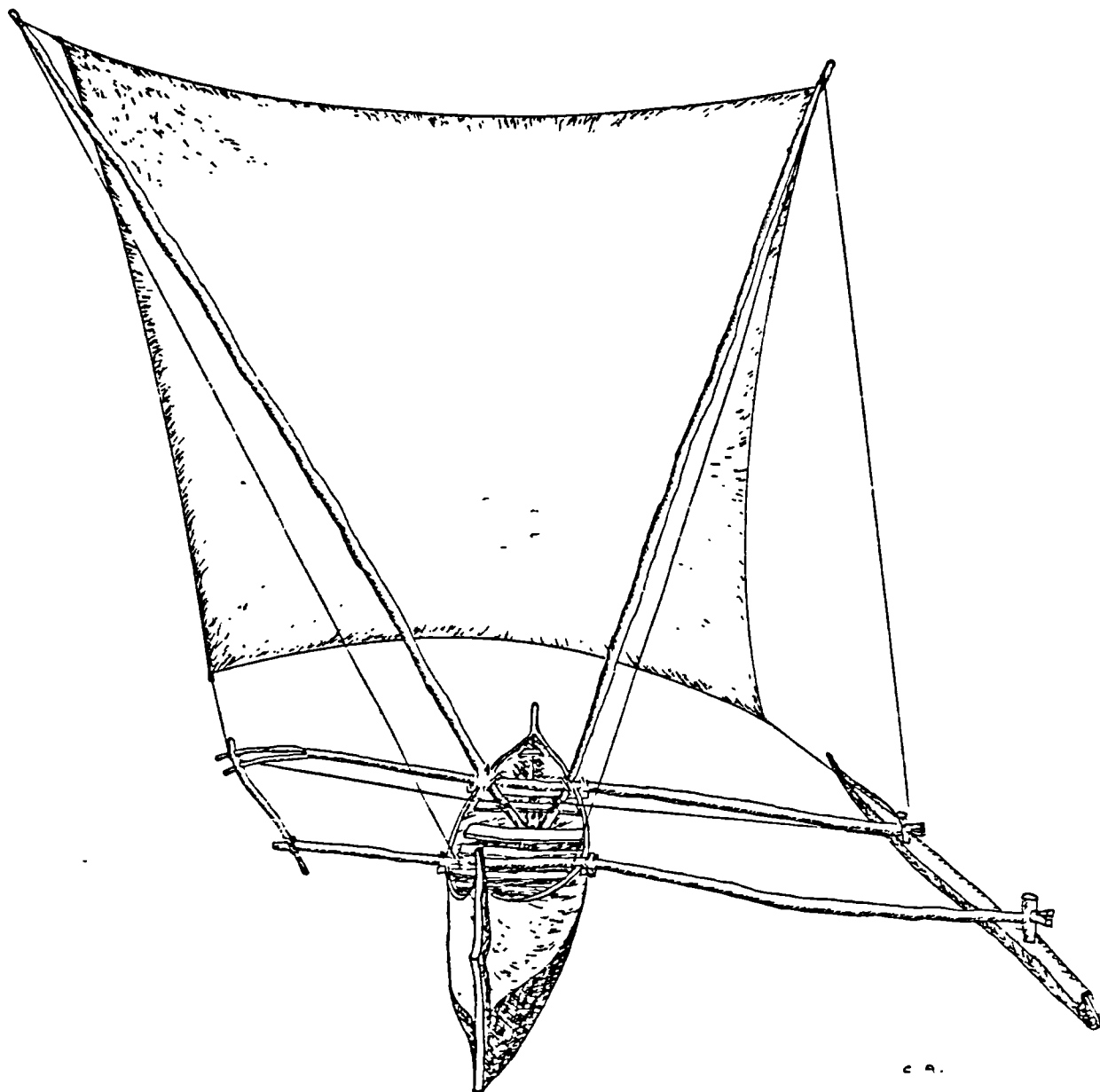
implying that he is drifting out of Vezoness. But when he builds canoes, he is Vezo (see below, ch.4).

sailing

Except for the smallest canoes that can be sailed by a single person, sailing a canoe normally requires a team of two people; others can travel on the canoe as passengers. One person sits at the rear with the steering paddle, while the other sits behind the masts and follows his companion's orders by changing the masts' and sail's position, by adjusting the sail ropes and by perching out on the outrigger or on the booms to keep the canoe balanced in case of a sudden change of wind.

Sailing in a strong wind, when the canoe races over the water, gently breaking the waves or just flying over them, gives people great pleasure. When I was on the canoe, excited like my companions with its speed and the lightness of its race, I was told with pride that the sail is the Vezo's petrol, the motor of their canoes. The following description of a journey back from a fishing site which I once heard in Belo gives a clear impression of the aesthetic appreciation of sailing. Father and son start rigging their canoe; the wind, which is blowing inland from the sea, is very strong. Looking westwards towards the setting sun, the father measures the distance between the sun and the horizon: two zehy (the distance between thumb and forefinger) are left. Will they and

FIG.2 • SAILING



their canoe make it back to shore before the sun sets? The canoe is rigged and ready to start the race back. They land on shore and look back: less than a span is left before the sun sinks into the ocean.

A first requirement for sailing is to know the terminology used to give and carry out orders; one must know the names of all the parts of the canoe, of the various sail positions, of the arrangements of ropes and knots. This terminology is the first thing that Fañolana, the Antandroy who would like to know more about the sea, was taught by his Vezo relatives.

Children learn the basic sailing techniques by playing with their small toy canoes; they use the correct technical terminology while they carefully try out various positions of the sail.¹⁴ Solo (aged six) often impressed me, though he was probably trying more to impress his father, by showing in which position he would put the masts and arrange the sail if he were sailing in a certain direction, given that the wind was blowing from such and such a quarter. He would proudly put up his hand and use his fingers to indicate the exact position in which he would place the masts.

Children and younger boys are often said not to be strong enough to sail. Although strong arms and hands are required to steer the paddle against the current, if one knows how to do this properly the steering is not particularly tiring. But the operations involved in

changing the position of the masts according to the direction of the wind or, more seriously, the rigging of a canoe at sea, when one has to stand on the narrow edges of the canoe, plunge the 5-metre masts vertically into the water, pull them up high enough to lift them over the sides of the hull and gently put them in their place, are tasks which no young boy is strong enough to perform. Solo is a remarkably small and frail child who will have to wait a long while before he can actively help in sailing. Nonetheless, when he puts up his fingers as if they were long and heavy masts, he is happy to show how much he has already learnt and to be told that he "knows the canoe" (fa mahay laka iha!).

Knowing how to sail implies being able to predict the directions of the wind, the conditions of currents and waves, the tides, and changes in the weather, the configuration of the sea-bed and the reference points along the coast. Before setting out fishing, one waits for the right wind: the movements of the branches of the coconut trees are carefully observed to judge when the wind becomes strong enough for sailing, and to predict how the wind will change through the day; this will also affect the decision where to go fishing; but the absence of dew early in the morning when the wind blows from land to sea, for example, warns that the wind might not change direction at midday.

Knowing the weather (mahay toetrandro) is a prerequisite for safe sailing; if bad weather, a rough sea

or a strong wind are predicted, sailing will simply be deferred. The fact that sailing is always potentially dangerous is also recognized. However, as the notion of 'danger' and 'difficulty' are expressed by the same word (sarotsy), if sailing is difficult/dangerous, danger is inversely correlated to knowledge and expertise: the more one knows, the less difficult/dangerous sailing becomes. Sailing in a rough wind, or landing successfully when the surf close to the shore could easily capsize the canoe, are signs that the persons riding the canoe are "very Vezo" (Vezo mare).

Feats at sea are recounted again and again in the evenings, or at gatherings for funerals or village meetings; conditions of sea and wind, dangers braved and actions taken are dwelt on in great detail. These tales of success are a means of restating and recognizing the narrator's Vezoness. The audience joins in this process of self-declaration: their own Vezoness is proven by the fact that they are able to follow the story and take part in the narrative. Women do the latter but they are rarely protagonists of the tales, for they are not normally in control of sailing. The presence of women on a sailing expedition often has the effect of reducing the level of risk one is prepared to take. A journey may be put off because "the waves are not women's waves" (tsy lozokin'ampela). Similarly, in my experience, when two canoes that had set out on the same journey began to face exceptionally strong winds, the sail of the canoe which

transported four women was doubled up so as to reduce speed and to minimize the impact of the waves on the hull, while the canoe with only men on board was allowed to run spectacularly at great speed.

During this particular journey, however, another significant incident also occurred. At the critical moment when the two canoes left the mouth of the mangrove swamp and entered the open sea, the canoe with the women on board found itself in serious trouble. One of the women took a leading part in getting it out of danger. She jumped into the sea and, standing in shallow water, held the canoe against the wind, changed the position of the masts and rearranged the sail to prevent the canoe from capsizing. Months later, a man recounted a difficult journey he had on the same route. His tale was interrupted by the woman who told of her own past performance; she recalled that her brother, the only man on the canoe with her, was far more scared than she was and that, if it had been for him, they would never have made it back to the village. In this instance, she had been more Vezo than him.

Unsuccessful stories are also related which tend to demonstrate that dangerous situations arise when risks are taken by people who are not Vezo enough to face them. When people make minor mistakes that do not result in serious hazards, they are teased and told that they must have become Masikoro; when more traumatic incidents occur and the danger has been real and frightening, it is not so

much the un-Vezoness of those involved that is emphasized as the fact that they "do not know yet" (mbo tsy mahay). Vezoness is not a given asset: it must be acquired through learning and practice.

I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter the case of a Masikoro who is taken fishing and learns how things work out at sea. In another instance, the definitive confirmation that a Korao¹⁵ had become fully Vezo was given when his canoe capsized; after spending three days drifting at sea, he eventually made it back to shore. I was surprised at first that a story meant to prove that a Korao had successfully become a Vezo should concern his canoe capsizing at sea, but I was told that "when capsizing happens, whether you are Vezo or not, it just happens".¹⁶ But had the man not been Vezo, he would have tried to swim back to shore and he would have died of exhaustion; but having learnt the ways of the sea, he knew that the only chance of surviving was to hold on to the canoe and wait for the currents to push him back to shore.¹⁷ He not only saved his life but he made himself a Vezo.

fishing

Fishing is the livelihood of the Vezo (fivelomam-bezo). In chapter 2 I discuss what kind of livelihood makes the Vezo Vezo; here, I look at fishing as one of the activities that the Vezo learn and know. The types of fishing, the tools that are employed and the techniques in use are

many, and they vary noticeably from place to place. The fishing techniques described by Koechlin (1975) for Bevato, south of Morombe, differ from those I observed in Betania or in Belo. Near Morombe, the Vezo exploit the coral reef, while near Morondava, where there is no reef, the Vezo practice line fishing almost exclusively; in Belo, by contrast, people exploit the vast lagoon and its canals with a variety of techniques that depend on the kind of fishing net they employ. I shall return to the significance of these variations (see below, ch.4); in this section, I describe some fishing activities as part of the many practical pursuits that people learn on becoming Vezo.

The first fishing activity I undertook soon after arriving in Betania consisted in catching a kind of tiny shrimp called patsa. At certain times of the year these shrimp swim in huge shoals towards the shore. To catch them, people use small push-up nets made with a rectangular piece of mosquito-netting, hemmed with thick cotton cloth which is looped at the four corners. Two people stand in the water and hold the net, one corner in one hand and the other loop tied around a big toe; they move slowly, parallel to the shore, holding the net well stretched out and almost entirely immersed. As they walk, they sweep up the shrimp; after a certain number of steps, depending on the weight of the catch, they get hold of the immersed loop with their free hand and slowly raise it, folding the

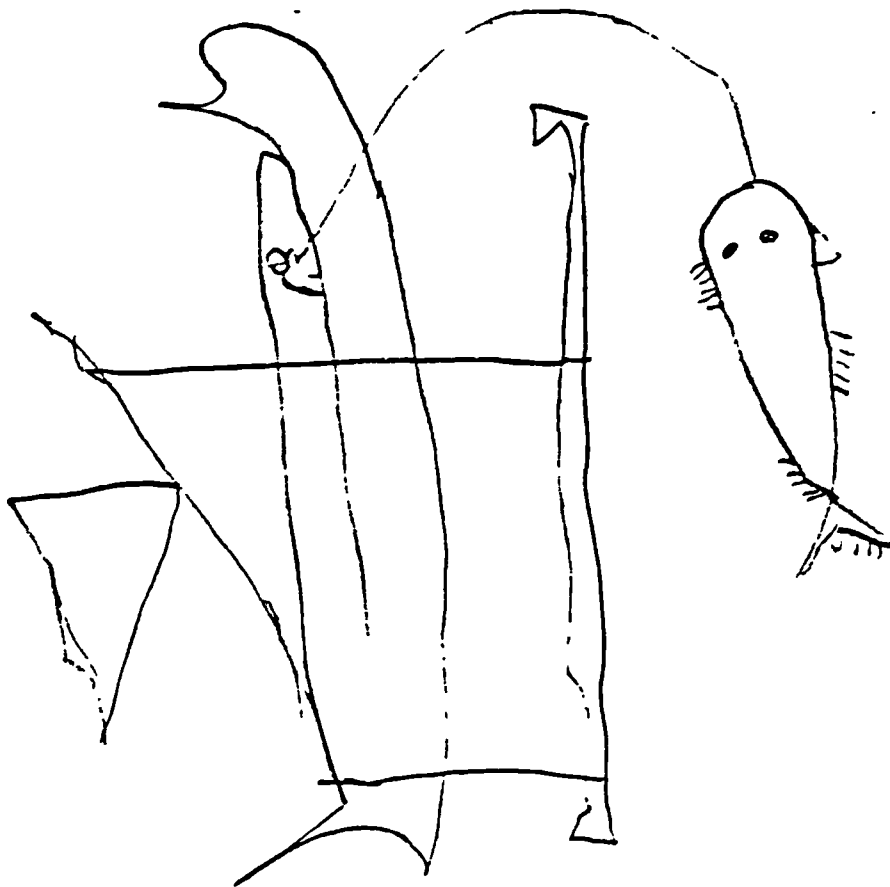
net like a sack. A third person carries a basket where the shrimp slowly accumulate. When the basket is full, it is carried to the flat area between the shore and the village, and the shrimp are scattered over the sand to dry under the scorching sun. At mid-afternoon of the same day, when the shrimp are completely desiccated, they are gathered together in little heaps mixed with sand, which are then carefully sieved with large tin sieves. Finally the dried shrimp are put in large jute bags and are ready for sale.

When the shrimp are close to the shore, it is very easy to catch them; but they come and go very suddenly, and a successful catch depends to a great extent on the ability to predict or guess the exact moment when they will swim towards the shore. Changes in the weather, the intensity and changes in the currents, the colour of the ocean and the behaviour of some kinds of fish provide useful clues. When the shrimp are expected to appear, there is great bustle and excitement as people expectantly wait for the catch. Women go often to look at the conditions of the sea and children are sent every now and then to check if other people have seen anything. When the shrimp appear, everyone rushes to the shore with nets and baskets. At this point, it is crucial to locate the areas with the highest concentration of shrimp -- the colour of the water and the ripples on its surface are the signs a Vezo ought to be able to read.

Children are very active in this type of fishing. Pulling a shrimp net through the water can be very tiring, but people claim that it is just a matter of having strong toes. Children develop these by using the shrimp net to catch small fish, close to the shore or near the mangrove swamp, at times when there are no shrimp. This activity keeps children busy for hours. Usually it is little more than a game, described by grown-ups as "nonsense fishing" (maminta fahatany), and it ends with children cooking their miniature catch in miniature pots on miniature fires. But these games can also be more productive; in some instances, the catch can contribute significantly to the family meal or it can be taken and sold at the market. A twelve year-old girl got into the habit of catching a bucket-full of little fish, which she carried to the market and sold. After a week of this, the girl got a bad toothache and stopped fishing; she never took it up again, partly because of changes in the tide, and partly because she was still too young to entirely give up playing "nonsense fishing" with her siblings.

Line fishing predominates in Betania. Dozens of canoes sail out in the morning to reach one of the fishing sites (riva). The location is chosen according to sailing conditions and with reference to the previous day's catch in different fishing sites. Generally, the majority of canoes converges on the same riva.¹⁸ On arrival, each canoe chooses a spot to weigh the anchor and starts

FIG.3 • FISHING



5' 11" 2"

0705

fishing. The fish people seek most of all is called lamatsa (Scomberomorus Leopardus, a kind of Spanish mackerel). Since lamatsa moves in shoals, the fishing day is punctuated by long periods of boredom and inactivity, when people snooze the time away, sitting and lying on the canoe in more or less awkward positions, followed by hectic moments when a shoal swims by and the fish suddenly start nibbling at the bait. Once a fish is hooked, retrieving it close to and into the canoe requires very strong arms and tough hands to keep hold of the line. To avoid breaking the line, the fish must be played upon by giving it some line when it pulls harder and hauling it in when it tires.

The main difficulty in fishing is to be able to fool the lamatsa, which is considered to be very clever (mahihitsy). Other kinds of fish can be caught simply by baiting a hook and waiting. The lamatsa, by contrast, only likes a certain kind of bait, which must be prepared most carefully so as to reproduce the shape of a fish. The hook must be invisible, and the angle at which the bait is put on the hook is crucial, for the bait has to appear to be swimming like a real fish.¹⁹

In addition to the technical aspects of line fishing, there are serious practical difficulties in spending long stretches of time on the canoe. Children have to learn to cope with the hardship of sitting for hours under the tropical sun, rocking on the waves. They are not yet fully Vezo, and thus it is understood if not expected that they

will suffer somewhat at first. Children are sea-sick or feel hungry, and are troublesome and fussy about relieving themselves in the sea. I saw a child being sick half an hour into his first fishing expedition; smiling, his father first lifted him and plunged him into the water to wash him off, then cleaned the canoe, took off his shirt and draped it over a paddle to make a small shelter for the boy. After a long nap, the boy recovered and by the time we returned to the village he was cheerful and hungry. But when we arrived home, the father described the incident, and the boy was made fun of. This was one instance when I felt that learning to be Vezo is not always a gentle process (see also below, ch.3).

fish

"The Vezo know fish" (Vezo mahay fia). They know where to find fish and when fish is at its best and fattest. The behaviour and location of different kinds of fish varies with the seasons; some fish, for example, "close their mouths" at times of the year. Vezo knowledge of fishing places is highly localized, for people tend to know only those areas that they actually exploit. When people move, they have to learn this knowledge afresh.

Knowing fish means knowing their names.²⁰ Nonetheless, although I myself never learnt more than a few fish names, I compensated for this by knowing how to eat fish like a Vezo, without choking on the bones. The way to do this is to stuff one's mouth with a piece of fish -- flesh, skin

and bones together -- and swallow only the flesh and skin, spitting out all the bones. This is easier to do with larger fish; smaller fish with small, hard to detect bones can be dangerous particularly for younger children. In addition, children must also acquire a taste for certain fish that "smell" (misy fofony, i.e have a strong taste).

Sea turtle, which is particularly "smelly", is cooked following customs (fomba) and prescriptions (faly) that make its meat and broth a peculiarity of Vezo cuisine and tastes. Since it is prohibited to cook sea turtle with salt, sea water is used instead: the result not only "smells" very strong, but is salty and sharp (mahatsiro). When I first ate sea turtle and remarked factually that it was very salty, I was told that if one is Vezo one likes it so. As a result, I began to learn to like it like that.

The fact that the Vezo like and eat good food is part of an elaborate discourse about their mode of livelihood (see below, ch.2). One aspect of this discourse is that the Vezo are good cooks. However, they do not lay very much emphasis on their ability to cook fish; this is something that seems to be taken for granted. What is taken to distinguish the Vezo is their ability to cook rich food (laoke matavy).²¹ It is no coincidence that the first exciting conversations I had in Betania were about food and cooking recipes and that the most cheerful piece of recording I have is of a woman who explains how the Vezo cook shark in its own liver, which is fat and melts like lard to make one of the richest dishes available.

Knowing fish also implies knowing how to sell or barter it, how to cure it and preserve it. In what follows, I briefly examine the marketing of fish caught in Betania. This trade is centred on the Morondava market and is almost exclusively in women's hands (see below, ch.2). The necessary knowledge and expertise differs in Belo where different commercial outlets are employed.

To know how to trade fish²² in Betania means in the first place to be able to take fish to the market that will stay fresh until it is sold. This implies a capacity to evaluate the length of time before the fish goes bad and the average length of time it takes to sell. The length of time a fish stays fresh depends on the type of fish and on general weather conditions; the time it takes to sell it will depend on factors of supply and demand. A tradeswoman's ability consists in obtaining the most information about the (highly variable) trading conditions of the market in order to pursue the most effective sale's strategy.

Daily prices are of course affected by the quantity and quality of fish on offer. Fish prices, however, are also affected by the supply and price of meat, which is the main local alternative to fish. If none or little meat is on sale (for example because supplies have been bought up for a funeral in a nearby village), fish sells more easily and at a high price. Rice supplies also significantly affect the fish market, for when rice is scarce or expensive, the Vezo find it hard to sell their fish. The

Vezo argue that this occurs because people do not eat fish if they have no rice to accompany it;²³ more likely, demand for fish contracts because less money is available over and above what it costs to buy the staple food, rice.

When the canoes return with their catch, the women have to decide what to do with the fish they have the responsibility of selling. They can either go straight to the market themselves or sell the fish to another saleswoman; they can take the fish to a nearby cooperative, which buys the fish wholesale for freezing and sale in Antananarivo; they can smoke the fish or clean it and leave it to hang (the latter can only be done during the colder winter weather). In the last two cases, however, the fish will last no longer than a day after the catch. Direct sale at the market is usually the most profitable choice, but if it is known or expected that the market will be oversupplied, it may be more profitable to smoke the fish and sell the next morning, even if the price of smoked fish at any one moment is always lower than that of fresh fish.²⁴ Clearly, however, this second strategy works if only a few women adopt it; otherwise, as sometimes happens, the excess supply is simply deferred to the following day, when everyone brings smoked fish to the market. Selling at the cooperative is normally the least profitable choice, but it has the advantage of being faster. It is not uncommon for the income from a sale to be needed to buy rice for the day's evening meal, because people in Betania prefer not to stock any rice at home

(see below, ch.2); in this case, the woman will decide to take her fish to the cooperative despite the loss of income.

Some women specialize as intermediaries, buying and reselling fish for a small profit (manao tongotsy). Every day a steady flow of fish moves along the coast until it reaches the wooden tables of Morondava market. Baskets of fish, both fresh and smoked, are carried along a female trading chain which includes a considerable number of exchanges. When the fish finally reaches the market, it can either be sold to a consumer or enter a new chain of intermediation, which now takes the direction of the Masikoro villages in the interior. The profit margins in this system are so small, however, that it is very easy to make a mistake and lose money (maty vola, lit. dead money). On the marketplace, the women engaged in this trade are tense and intent, ready to exploit the smallest opportunity for a small profit. As these women say, they know the market better than anyone else because they are "used to it" (fa zatsy mamarotsy a bazary).

Vezo women are certainly not the only ones involved in these forms of trade. What makes them Vezo -- what makes those who are particularly good at it "very Vezo" -- is the fish they handle and the smell on their hands and their clothes when they come home from the market. What makes them Vezo is also the kind of deceit they employ. By contrast with some of their non-Vezo clients, these women "know fish" (mahay fia). On the Vezo's own definition,

someone who buys fish without realizing that it is beginning to go bad must be a Masikoro. Indeed, when a Vezo woman manages to sell some bad fish she is happy, proud that her Vezo knowledge has fooled her Masikoro client who doesn't know the difference.²⁵

learning and unlearning: the importance of living on the coast

If the Vezo are rendered Vezo by the knowledge I have described, we might ask how people acquire it.²⁶ We have seen that Fañolana -- someone who is willing to learn Vezoness, but is partly too afraid to do so -- thinks that "learning about the sea" is very difficult. The Vezo themselves, by contrast, are convinced that learning these things is very easy.

Rolpha is an old man who was born and lives in Lovobe, a Vezo village just south of Betania. Rolpha explained that when his forefathers left Bekoropoka (a village in the interior) to settle in Lovobe, they were Masikoro because up to then they had lived in a Masikoro village.²⁷ When they moved to Lovobe, however, they learnt to go out to sea and they became Vezo.²⁸ When I asked Rolpha who taught his forefathers to be Vezo, I got the following answer.

When they first came here, of course, this place was already Vezo. So when they came here, they just took up learning; this is not difficult to do. Even

little children, when they learn, learn quickly. This is because there are no papers involved, one gets no diploma; there are no diplomas for these things. When one learns how to paddle, however, one knows how to move on a canoe. This is how one learns about the canoe. Thus our ancestors knew; and we learnt in their steps. For one does what one's parents did; as whites say: "tel fils tel père [sic]". And so, what one's father did is what one does also. This is how things go. We learnt about the canoe and we know about the canoe; our grandchildren learn about it also. This is how things go.²⁹

Rolpha was addressing what appear only superficially to be two distinct issues, namely how non-Vezo become Vezo and how the children of Vezo parents become Vezo themselves. Let us look at the second issue first. Children and grandchildren follow in their parents' steps and become, rather than being already, what their parents and grandparents were before them. Vezoness, in other words, is not inherited;³⁰ it has to be learnt to be transmitted over the generations. Rolpha's ancestors became Vezo by doing what all Vezo people must do to be such.

Children of Vezo parents have an easy time in learning Vezoness simply by playing games with their toy-canoes in the sea. In describing his ancestors' transformation, Rolpha also seemed to underplay the difficulty of learning

to be Vezo for someone who was formerly a Masikoro, although we have seen from Fañolana's experience how hard the process can be. Furthermore, despite his constant use of the verb fa mahay, which implies learning,³¹ Rolpha seemed to ignore entirely the process of learning itself. This attitude is quite typical. All my Vezo friends portrayed learning as a sharp transition (a 'jump' rather than a process) from a state of "not yet knowing" to a state of full knowledge. Rolpha gave me an idea of what it is that brings about this "jump". Having stated that before moving to Lovobe his ancestors were Masikoro because they lived in the interior, Rolpha explained that because the land they moved to was Vezo land, they automatically started to learn Vezo things on settling there.

The place where one resides plays a crucial role in the way people conceive of the acquisition of Vezoness. If acquiring Vezo knowledge makes the Vezo Vezo, the place where people live will determine the kind of knowledge they learn. In the interior people learn to be Masikoro, on the coast they learn to be Vezo.³² This belief conceals rather more than the matter of fact observation that people who raise cattle learn how to make cattle troughs, whereas people who live off the sea learn how to build canoes.

Firstly, differences between Vezo and Masikoro knowledge are not neutral. In particular, the Vezo view the Masikoro as being awkward and incapable of performing

Vezo activities;³³ if they become adept, it means that they have ceased to be Masikoro and have 'jumped' into Vezoness. By contrast, the Vezo believe themselves to be uninterested in learning and knowing Masikoro practices: tsy mahefa, they can't be bothered. For the Vezo, living on the coast is rather more than a fortuitous circumstance. Their boasts about their skills and swiftness ultimately rest on the fact that they are people who live close to the sea.

Secondly, the importance of where people live for determining the kind of knowledge they acquire suggests that living on the coast is what makes the Vezo Vezo. "All the people who live near the sea are Vezo", because "being Vezo is a consequence of where one is, of the place where one lives".³⁴ The emphasis on the Vezo's environment takes us back to the notion that Vezoness is contextual. Rather than deriving from people's inherent qualities, Vezoness is grounded in the place where people happen to live.

Because Vezoness is contextual, people can also lose it.³⁵ Just as non-Vezo strangers who move to the coast become Vezo, Vezo who depart from the coast leave their Vezoness behind, for Vezo knowledge is practical; as Rolpha said, it is not a matter of diplomas and papers. People know how to build canoes when and if they build a canoe, they know how to sell fish when and if they sell it. If one stops building canoes or selling fish, one stops being Vezo.

As my date of departure approached, my friends began to make insistent comments on my ability to eat fish. I found this sudden interest in something I had learnt months earlier rather odd, until someone remarked that my parents in Italy would be astonished to see me eat fish in this way; they would exclaim: "you really are Vezo!" (fa Vezo tokoa iha!). As far as my friends could judge, eating fish and spitting out the bones was the only Vezo activity I could engage in back home, in the absence of canoes, a beach and fishing expeditions. Whereas my abstract knowledge of Vezoness does not make me Vezo if I live in England,³⁶ eating fish in a certain way preserves my Vezoness abroad.

What about the people living in Betania who are engaged in wage labour? Are they Vezo?

They are Vezo! Well, some of them are Vezo, but there are also some who aren't ... ah, some of them really know nothing about the sea! If they still get out there, if they still go fishing, ah, they are still Vezo. For you see, Vezo are people who aren't afraid of the sea; so one is Vezo if one isn't afraid of the sea. But some of these people only go to work, and never get to go out there at sea.³⁷

The man who told me this was clearly uneasy and hesitated to state that wage-labourers were not Vezo. He felt he had to justify his statement: if the Vezo are people who do

not fear the sea, how can one say that people who never go out to sea are Vezo? His hesitation is a further clue to the nature of Vezoness. Vezoness cannot be defined normatively as a series of requirements to which Vezo people must comply; rather, it is a cluster of many fragments of knowledge, of practices and experiences, some of which I must still describe.

Notes. Chapter 1

1. "Aja kely kely mbo tsy azo atao Vezo, atao hoe anabezo. Reo zaza reo, io fianarandrozy, ao añaty rano ao, mianatsy mandaño reo, lafa miasa mandaño, miasa mandaño, mianatsy, lafa ie mahay mandaño, aha, fa mahasaky rano zao, fa azo atao hoe Vezo" [Jean-Didier: Betania].

2. "Hoatra zay laha misy Masikoro bakañy aminy faritany antety avy de mipetsaky eto a Betania ziska manambaly; jerevy fiveloman'olo eto tsy misy tanimbary raha tsy mandeha maminta, manarato, mandeha andriva. Farany ze mety hotongany velahiny reñy na rafozany anty amin'zao mandeha maminta aña; de eo miasa sainy aia atao amin'zao sy izao fandehany raha ty; kanefa raiamandreny tsy mahafantratra zany, tsy mahay amin'zay. Lasa amin'zao izy andesin' namany manahakan'zao manahakan'zao, farany mahay - manjary Vezo zany izy" [Leky, Betania].

3. "Ndra iha zao lafa avy eto, hoe aha: madame io mitoa. Ha! maminta matetiky madame io, fa Vezo atoko: tsy fa Vezo iha? nefa vazaha baka lavitsy aña. Lafa maminta iha isanandro etoa: Ha! madame io Vezo, satsia fa mitolo rano, satsia fa mive laka, fa atao Vezo zay" [Belefo, Belo].

4. The concept of teaching to swim does not exist. When I suggested that I could teach a child to swim, people could not understand how I could do so.

5. The outrigger canoe consists of a hull (ain-daka, lit. "the breath of the canoe"), an outrigger (fañary), two booms (varoña aloha, varoña afara), a pole which lies parallel to and opposite the outrigger (linga), two masts (tehy) and a rectangular sail (lay). It is steered with a paddle called five fañoria. A medium-sized canoe is 7m long and 0.65m wide at its widest point; the two masts are 5m long.

6. Koechlin (1975:109) mentions special canoes for sea-turtle hunting; Ottino (1963:283) reports "pirogues spécialement aménagées" used for the same purpose in Morombe. Faublée M. & Faublée J. 1950:438 refer that in Anakao, south of Tulear, the Vezo use particularly large canoes for transport (laka kibaroa).

7. The tree's circumference is measured by embracing the trunk (mañoho farafatse). If the distance between the fingertips is more than two zehy (the distance between thumb and forefinger) the trunk is considered suitable for building a canoe. The height of the tree is judged by sight and experience; no formal rules for measuring it exist.

8. To begin with, the two ends of the tree-trunk are cut into a wedge-shape; the top end will become the canoe's stern. The trunk, with its bark still on, is hollowed out and is then given shape (miasa kabary, from the French gabarie, model) on the outside.

9. The bottom half of the hull, which lies below the water line, gradually gets waterlogged and rots; the upper part lasts much longer and is reused more than once as side-planking.

10. See also Koechlin 1975:73-86 and Faublée M. & Faublée J. 1950.

11. The felling of the farafatse is considered to be a difficult job (raha sarotsy, a difficult thing; asa bevata, a big job). For this reason, a number of prohibitions (faly) apply to the people involved. For example, neither the man who is cutting a tree in the forest and his wife at the village can have sexual intercourse while the man is in the forest (on the other hand, if the pair is together in the forest they can have sex); a man whose wife is pregnant cannot fell a tree for a canoe, for the operation resembles that for preparing a coffin and would be inauspicious for the wife. If the felling is unsuccessful, the failure is not attributed to technical error or incompetence, but is viewed as a sign of worry or danger for the canoe-owner's relatives, his wife or his ancestors. Faublée J. and M. 1950 report (quoting Julien 1925-29) that before felling the farafatse the Vezo address "les esprits de la nature" and sacrifice to them.

12. Vezo who live in areas where farafatse does not grow or has become very scarce buy their canoes from other Vezo who live closer to the primary materials (Faublée J and M 1950:434-42). See Battistini 1964:113 on the supply of canoes in southern Madagascar.

13. Comparing canoes to a cattle trough has didactic purposes in a story reported by Koechlin (1975:63-5). A group of Vezo settle in a Mahafaly village and begin pursuing typically Vezo activities, which the Mahafaly observe with some surprise. When the Vezo say that they are going into the forest to fell a tree for a canoe, the Mahafaly ask what a canoe looks like. The Vezo reply that "c'est un monoxyle creusé à la manière de votre auge à bétail, mais un bien plus grand".

14. Petit (1930:209) noted that Vezo children receive their first sailing lessons with these toys.

15. This is a generic term used on the west coast for the people from south-eastern Madagascar.

16. "fa ny arendrea, na Vezo na tsy Vezo lafa tonga, lafa avy ny arendrea, fa avy avao" [Leky: Betania].

17. "Etoa Betania zao de misy: Korao avy any tanindrazana aña, misy mipetsaky antimo aty izy. Tsy mba mahay raha amin'zao indraiky. Lafa nanambaly taty izy, nandeha amilaka, nianatsy laka, fa nahay laka. Farany renjiky amilaka aña aña rano aña. Misy telo andro aña rano aña; afaky telo andro avy antety. De tsy Vezo fa Korao nefa efa nianatsy fandehany mbato izy, farany nahay de niavy antety zelahy" [Leky: Betania].

18. After reading Barth's (1981:45-7) transactionalist analysis of how fishing sites are chosen by Norwegian fishermen, it is difficult to add anything more.

19. I lack the space to discuss the unimportance of magical practice among the Vezo. Although "fishing medicines" (aolim-binta, lit. medicine of the hook) are employed, no-one admits to doing so personally. I discovered that a member of my adoptive family used aolim-binta by chance, after he came in despair to tell his sister that a mouse had eaten it. Unusually successful people are suspected of using "fishing medicines"; sometimes whole villages are believed to possess medicines that keep the fish away from outsiders. On the other hand, if someone is consistently unsuccessful, s/he will claim to be the victim of sorcery through fanabaka (a special kind of fanafody gasy, lit. malagasy medicine). Such claims mostly remain a matter of suspicion and simple conversation and are rarely taken any further. If the matter is pursued, the victim approaches a diviner (ombiasa). People's attitudes towards positive magic and sorcery could be usefully examined in the light of the declaratory emphasis the Vezo place on their knowledge. Thus, to admit to the use of aolim-binta when one is successful would dequalify one's personal skills; conversely, to suspect others of using such medicines amounts to questioning their superior abilities. It is significant that interventions against an enemy's fishing performance are not normally directed against the enemy's body but against his/her canoe. This choice may be due to the sorcerer's easier access to a canoe than to a person. The result, however, is that people who fail in fishing do so because they ride a canoe made "dirty" (maloto) by "malagasy medicine"; anyone using that canoe will be affected. I would suggest that the attack on the canoe, while being potentially more disruptive, is perceived as shifting the responsibility of failure away from individual skills and knowledge. In this respect the Vezo

appear to differ from the Malays described by Firth. Firth noted that "skill in fishing is not denied, but skill alone is not finally effective" (1946:123). However, the Malays think that fisherman and boat must be in "agreement": "to 'agree' with a man means that the boat will probably do well for him in catching fish (...). In a way, the boat is conceived as being an active partner in getting fish, and if one's own catches are poor while others are not, it may be the boat's fault" (1946:145). It thus seems that when fishing is unsuccessful the Malays, like the Vezo, lay the fault on the canoe; when fishing is successful, the Vezo are inclined to stress instead their skills and knowledge. Thus, if the canoe is fast, the people who built it and those who sail it will be "very Vezo".

20. The name of the fish does not always need to be specified. Kola, aged ten, was well-known for his ability to avoid any task he was asked to do. His mother asked him to clean the fish she had brought back from the market. Kola called out to his younger sister, who however was not around; he tried to gain time and pretended to be fixing the sail of his toy canoe. His mother repeated her request to clean the fish. Kola looked at it and asked her what kind of fish it was: "ino karazam-pia io?". At this point she lost her temper, shouting "I don't know! that animal over there that comes from the sea" (tsy haintefà! biby io bakan-drano io).

21. For example, the Masikoro are said to eat beans cooked in plain water; the Vezo instead eat beans mixed with coconut milk which adds flavour and fat to the dish.

22. What follows is neither a description nor an analysis of market structures and activities. Rather, it is a partial account of women's display of Vezoness through their market activities. For markets see also ch.2 below.

23. People may well eat only rice without an accompanying side dish, but it is unthinkable to eat fish (or any other side dish for that matter) without rice. The only exception occurs during ritual occasions, including the consumption of sea turtles, when rice is not consumed.

24. If large quantities of fresh fish are on sale in the evening, its price may be lower than that of smoked fish which is sold the next morning.

25. Cheating people who "do not know fish" was reported by Petit (1930:250), who noted the poor quality of smoked fish exchanged with the Masikoro. According to Petit, the fish is imperfectly cured, but if this is pointed out to a Vezo "il n'hésite pas à vous répondre: 'c'est bien assez bon pour un Masikore'". According to Koechlin (1975:94), the Vezo customarily sell a kind of inedible octopus to

the Masikoro; he also notes that the Masikoro cheat the Vezo in turn with an inferior quality of manioc.

26. In what follows, I examine the Vezo folk theory of learning rather than how they actually acquire knowledge. For an analysis of the latter among the Pukapukans (South Pacific), see Borofsky 1987; more general considerations in Bloch in press a.

27. "Reo tsy ho masikoro mifitaky antety aña, fa Bekoropoka antety tety? Masikoro reo" [Rolpha, Lovobe].

28. "De lafa niavy tety, nanjary Vezo zahay. Nianatsy lafa niavy taty, nianatsy ranomasina io, ehe, nanjary niha Vezo any" [Rolpha:Lovobe].

29. "Lafa niavy tatoy voalohany rozy, tany ty fa tanim-bezo raha teo, taloha. Ka lafa niavy an-rozy, nandramby avao koa nianatse. Reo tsy raha sarotsy ianara, na zaza kelikeliky manahakan'zao, lafa mianatsy, malaky mahay, satsia tsy misy taratasy moa, raha ahazoa diplôme, fa io tsy raha misy diplôme. Fa lafa mianatsy mive, fa mahay mive, fa mahay manday laka. Zay ñy fianara laka zay. Ka razanay reo fa nahay, nianatsy koa zahay nandimby any reo, satsia raha nataon- draiamandrenintefia any vo ataontefia - arakaraky tenim-bazaha manao hoe: 'tel fils tel père'. Zay io, raha nataon' babantefia, ataon-tefia koa. Zay fandehany. Nianatsy laka zahay, nahay laka; nianatsy laka koa zafinay retoa. Zay io fandehany io" [Rolpha, Lovobe].

30. I never asked whether a father who is an expert sailor, and is therefore "very Vezo", is more likely to have children similarly endowed with Vezoness. The idea was never raised by my informants, who would quite often refer to other individual features (physical or temperamental, like lazyness, stupidity or quick-temperedness) as inherited traits. The notion of inherited traits was never applied to Vezo knowledge. See Firth (1946:103-4) for an interesting contrast: "it is thus not necessary for the occupation [of juru selam, i.e. all experts in locating fish by 'diving'] to be inherited. There is, however, an opinion that an expert should have a like ancestry behind him".

31. The particle fa expresses the notion of an accomplished act, while the verb mahay refers to a state of knowing achieved by an active acquisition of knowledge. The verb mahay implies the notion of acquired learning; by contrast, the verb mahafantatra may refer to knowledge one has never acquired. I wish to thank Elie Rajaonarison for pointing this out to me.

32. This process is usually described by saying that once people settle on the coast, they start following the 'customs' of the people of the coast (manaraky fomban'olo an-driaky).

33. See Walen 1881-4:9-10: "Owing to the Masikoro's inability to navigate, the Vezo, when they wish to apply an abusive epithet to them, scornfully tell them they are but Masikoro by which they mean: 'You no more understand how to manage a canoe than a mountaineer or a man from the woods'".

34. "Olo mifitaky andriaky iaby atao hoe Vezo" [Naboy, Belo]; "mahatonga iñy moa, avy amin'ny fitondrantefia haintefia, amin'ny toerany misy an-tefia" [Leky, Betania].

35. They can also fail to acquire it fully. The only person in Betania who took formal education seriously enough to attend University for two years has left the village to take up a job in a large town in the Highlands of Madagascar. While still in Betania, he used to work in the sugar plantation near Morondava. He explained that although his wages were very low and working conditions very hard, he was afraid of relying entirely on fishing because had spent so much time in school that he was "not very used to the sea" (tsy zatsy rano mare). Every time he had a day off from work, however, he joined his siblings and went fishing; he knew how to sail when the sea was calm, and he would help his mother to smoke the catch. Undoubtedly, as long as he lived in Betania he was Vezo (although not "very Vezo"), but his departure may well result in the loss of his Vezoness. I discuss wage employment and its consequences further below.

36. When people saw my fieldnotes which contained what I was learning about Vezoness, they would exclaim: "the whites know things!" (vazaha mahay raha). No-one ever suggested that writing about Vezoness made me Vezo.

37. "Vezo reo [olo miasa a Morondava aña], misy sasany Vezo, fa misy sasany koa tsy ... aha, sasany fa tsy mahay miasa an-drano mihihitsy. Laha mbo avy, mbo mandeha aña maminta lembe, mbo maminta an-driva, aha, mbo azo atao Vezo koa io; fa io Vezo moa, olo fa mahasaky rano moa, zay no fa azo atao Vezo ie lafa mahasaky rano. Fa sasany koa eto, aha, lafa miasa avao fa tsy mahavita mandehandeha an-drano iña" [Jean-Didier, Betania].

CHAPTER 2

FISHING AND FORAGING

When the Vezo say that one becomes Vezo through learning and knowing how to make canoes, sail, fish and so on, they are not making an abstract statement about an abstract kind of knowledge. The knowledge that renders the Vezo Vezo is what the Vezo practise; and what the Vezo practise is what "keeps [them] alive" (velomampo), it is their livelihood (fiveloma).

We saw in the Introduction that virtually all travellers, ethnologists and historians who have written about the Vezo have described them as fishing people. Yet because the term 'Vezo' refers merely to an occupation, to a technological specialization, to a mode of livelihood, observers have assumed that 'Vezoness' is insufficient for a proper definition of a distinct people. The literature on the Vezo thus appears to have missed the most basic and significant feature of Vezoness, which is that it is only a mode of livelihood: people are Vezo only through what

they know and what they do. They are what "keeps them alive".

This chapter discusses the mode of livelihood of the Vezo. Instead of providing an analysis of their economic organization, however, I aim to pursue the question: "what renders the Vezo Vezo?". Instead of asking how the Vezo "keep themselves alive", I examine how by "keeping themselves alive" they make and reproduce themselves as Vezo.

As with Vezo knowledge, livelihood provides an important field for the rhetorical assertion of Vezoness. We will see below that people possess a clear theory about the kind of economic enterprise that makes them Vezo. However, like all other aspects of Vezoness, economic ideology is experienced and constructed in the process of "keeping oneself alive". The practical difficulty I face is that this process varies very considerably all along the west coast of Madagascar. For example, the livelihood of the Vezo of Betania depends nearly exclusively on line fishing and on the sale of fresh fish on the Morondava market. The Vezo of Belo, instead, are more involved in net-fishing and specialize in building schooners. The Vezo of Soalara (see Map 1) are said to make (or have made) their living by sea-transport of people and goods (Battistini 1964). The Vezo of Morombe are described by Ottino (1963) as being in a constant flux between fishing and working as wage-labour for Indo-Pakistani traders, for example as dockers (kibaroa); on the other hand, my

informants in Betania also described the Vezo of Morombe as "divers" (mpaniriky) specialized wholly in fishing and selling lobsters¹. The extent to which the local town markets of Morondava, Morombe and Tulear affect Vezo patterns of exchange also varies considerably. Villages which are too far from these market towns to be able to trade their fish there resort to bartering with Masikoro villages in the interior (Ottino 1963; Battistini 1958 and 1964; Lavondès 1967; Koechlin 1975).

The modes of livelihood of the Vezo of Betania and the Vezo of Belo represent only a small selection of the many possible ways of being Vezo. Despite this high degree of variation, however, of which my informants were fully aware, the various ways in which the Vezo "keep themselves alive" have certain features in common: the Vezo have a distinctive mode of livelihood. Let us begin by exploring what this distinctiveness is about.

the livelihood of the Vezo

To begin with, let us ask what might seem to be an obvious question: what constitutes the livelihood of the Vezo (ino fivelomam-bezo?)? The answer I was given was: "the canoe is the livelihood of the Vezo" (laka ro fivelomam-bezo).

One way of interpreting this statement is to take the canoe as a metonymy for fishing, for it would appear an obvious fact that fishing constitutes Vezo livelihood. This inference, however, is both linguistically and analytically problematic. Whereas the Vezo employ specific

terms to describe the various kinds of fishing they practise -- line fishing (maminta), drift-net fishing (mihaza), barrier-net fishing (mitandrano) and diving (maniriky) -- they possess no generic term for fishing as such. Fishing activities may be described as "fighting the sea" (mitolo rano), an expression indicating that the people engaged in the "fight" are not afraid of the sea. But this expression can be applied to any activity that denotes some familiarity with the sea, like swimming, sailing or child's play in the water. Therefore, not only does the expression not refer solely to fishing, but it also does not identify the latter as a mode of livelihood.

If no general term exists for fishing as such, how do Vezo denote what they do for their livelihood? The term they use is mitindroke, which means "to look for food" (mila hany) or to forage.² Once again, however, this term is generic. It does not specify the identity of the forager, what kind of technology is employed or even the kind of food that is sought. Mitindroke can refer equally to people fishing in their canoes as to the pigs endlessly rooting around in the village sand;³ it applies equally to a Masikoro hunting tenrecs or searching for honey in the forest as to the inhabitants of Belo who collect sea cucumbers, which they consider inedible but sell to Indo-Pakistani traders for export to China. Mitindroke denotes the gathering of any kind of object which provides a means of livelihood. For example, mitindroke does not apply to children who look for wild plums in the forest. The reason

is not, as I originally thought, because they are children,⁴ but because the plums do not contribute to anyone's livelihood; if anything, as the children are repeatedly told, the plums make them sick. Usually what is collected by foraging is edible, and will be either consumed personally or traded; but mitindroke can also apply to inedible objects like sea-cucumbers whose sole purpose is to be sold.

The term mitindroke is analytically significant because it describes the livelihood of the Vezo without referring to their productive technology and activity, fishing. Mitindroke describes generic (rather than technologically-defined) features of foraging. To explain what foraging consists of my informants contrasted mitindroke with what mitindroke is not, namely agriculture (fambolea). This contrast makes the structural features of the Vezo mode of livelihood emerge quite clearly.

On the one hand, a person who "looks for food" goes out today (androany), sees things (mahita raha) and collects a little something (mahazo raha kely kely) every day (isanandro isanandro). An agriculturalist, on the other hand, must wait (miamby) for her products to grow (raha mitiry); at the end of the productive cycle she will reap a large crop (mahazo vokatsy bevata). People who "look for food" do not have land (tsy mana tanim-bary, tsy mana baiboho); cultivators, by contrast, possess land which comes to them from the past (avy bakañy bakañy).

Foraging is thus characterized, firstly, by the unmediated acquisition of objects, like fish in the sea and honey and tenrecs in the forest, that exist independently of the person who seeks and acquires them. Secondly, this acquisition occurs on a clearly specified time-scale: "looking for food" is a day by day, every day affair and does not involve the transmission of property through time. Finally, foraging is a small-scale, individually-based activity.

Before following the Vezo theory of their mode of livelihood any further, a point of clarification is needed. Instead of employing the contrast drawn by my informants between agriculture and foraging to analyze the Vezo economic organization or mode of production,⁵ I am interested in illustrating a major component of Vezo identity, how foraging is thought to 'make' different people from those 'made' by agriculture.

In this context, we may usefully compare Vezo statements about the contrast between agriculture and foraging with Raymond Firth's analysis of the differences between fishing and agriculture. On the one hand, Firth's description of the "specific features arising from its [the fishing economy's] specific technical conditions" is almost identical to that provided by my informants (1946:26-7).⁶ Firth's conclusion, however, was that "a Malay or Indonesian fishing economy has close structural analogies with a peasant economy and (...) may even be treated as a species of it. The difference is one of

nature of primary resources drawn on, not of basic organization" (1946:22; my emphasis). Firth suggested that "one may conveniently speak of all these Oriental small-scale primary producers as peasants. They may be termed peasant agriculturalists and peasant fishermen according to their calling, permanent or temporary as the case may be" (1946:23). More emphatically, "the Malay fisherman is not a race apart (...). As an orang ka laut, a man who goes to sea, he is distinguished from the orang darat, the inland folk, but he is at one with them in being essentially a peasant, with the same kind of economic and social outlook, the same type of social institutions and the same general standard of values" (1946:282; my emphasis). Whatever the value of the concept of an 'Oriental peasant', Firth's conclusion about the structural similarities between fishing and agricultural economies is the exact opposite of my informants' assesement.

This contrast confirms the significance of the notion of foraging as used by the Vezo. When Vezo describe themselves as foragers they do not refer merely to a 'fishing economy' -- which, as Firth claims, might be considered structurally identical to an economy based on agriculture -- but more generally to an economy with a "basic organization", a "kind of economic and social outlook", and a "type of social institutions and general standard of values" which differ crucially from those of a 'peasant economy'.

Among the Vezo, the difference between "the people who go to sea" and "the inland folk" is not perceived as being a matter of variation within a shared, common productive structure. Even though, as we saw in chapter 1 above, the Vezo can become Masikoro and vice versa, the conceptual opposition between Vezo and Masikoro is absolute and unambiguous (see also below, ch.4). However, the fact that the contrast is not restricted to one between fishing and agriculture, it is quite possible that a Vezo practise some kind of agricultural activity without ceasing thereby to be Vezo. Whether the Vezo are actually engaged in some form of cultivation is a matter of regional variation;⁷ what instead is invariant is the Vezo's declaratory emphasis on the marginal role of agriculture within an economic organization based on foraging.

What is more, my friends in Betania claimed categorically that agriculture is technically incompatible with fishing, which accordingly explains why the Vezo are invariably unsuccessful cultivators. As they argued, when a rice crop is almost ripe and the fields need constant supervision to scare off flocks of birds capable of destroying an entire harvest in a few hours, the Vezo would guard the fields for a few days; but as soon as they heard that the fish was biting well at sea, they would take off to fish for the day. On that single day, their harvest would be totally destroyed and their efforts would have proved to have been in vain. This view may seem rather fatalistic, but there seems little doubt that even

when the Vezo devote themselves seriously to cultivation, they keep their 'Vezo' priorities and preferences very clearly in mind. Ottino recounts the following incident, which is worth reporting in full for being such a good example of Vezo rhetoric:

Au retour d'une visite prolongée à l'un de ces champs de culture, relevant du village de Lamboara [south of Morombe], le propriétaire du champ, un homme d'environ trente-cinq ans, qui tout au long du chemin avait exprimé son dégoût à l'égard des pastèques voamanga, qui à cette période de l'année constituaient dans la région la culture la plus importante et en même temps la principale alimentation végétale, escala vivement une dernière dune et se retournant, me dit avec un large geste circulaire vers la mer: 'ty riaka avao, ro tondo'hay' (il n'y a que la mer qui soit notre champ de culture) (1963:280).

As this example demonstrates, even when the Vezo practise some form of cultivation they maintain and reaffirm their Vezoness by virtue of their association with the sea. Although Ottino's informant refers to the sea as the Vezo's 'fields', we know that the sea is a very peculiar kind of field which has no links with the past and from which people acquire small things every day: through their

association with the sea the Vezo remain fishing people and foragers.

We can now return to the statement that the canoe is the livelihood of the Vezo. Since we now know what the livelihood of the Vezo consists of, we are able to understand why the canoe represents it so fully. Vezo canoes last at most two years; they are light, flexible and fragile; they are built by few individuals and are sailed by no more than two; even the most successful catch can be no larger than what the canoe's narrow hull can carry back to shore. The canoe's physical structure reflects and incorporates all the characteristics of foraging: it is flimsy, short-lived and small-scale. The canoe, which is made for the sea, sums up beautifully the livelihood of the Vezo as a combination of fishing and foraging, or more precisely as fishing by way of foraging.

The statement that the canoe is the root of Vezoness (laka ro fototsin-havezoa) confirms that Vezoness is what people do to "keep themselves alive". Moreover, if the canoe stands for what I have suggested, this implies that the Vezo, made such by their canoe, are not merely a people devoted to fishing: they are a people whose fishing is short-term, small-scale and possesses no physical links with the past.

However, this specification must not be taken as a definite criterion of exclusion from Vezoness. The assessment of Vezoness is a matter of relative judgement

which depends considerably on the context in which it is made. Thus, on being shown a postcard from the Italian Riviera with small fishing boats in the foreground, my friends would exclaim enthusiastically how "very Vezo" Italians are. On the other hand, they found it hard to consider Vezo the Japanese crews of the large industrial fishing-boats that work off the coast of Morondava.⁸ While agreeing that the Japanese know a great deal about the sea (mahay rano mare) and from this perspective could be said to be "very Vezo", people also argued that the Japanese are not Vezo because of the size of boat (sambo bevata) they use and because they have no canoes (tsy manan-daka). In this context, the contrast between big boats and canoes is not purely technical, but is based on the opposition between what are perceived to be different modes of livelihood. The reason the Japanese cannot be considered straightforwardly Vezo is that their manner of fishing is not a matter of catching something every day with short-lived pieces of equipment. Their huge ships, which trawl the sea and threaten to deplete the local fish stock, prove that the Japanese are involved in a very different kind of enterprise.

the sea

When they refer to something that is in the sea, the Vezo use the adverb amboho, literally "behind one's back". A Masikoro, on the other hand, uses the term añatiny, which means "inside". A Vezo will say "take this fishing net

back there" (atery amboho eñy harata ifny"); a Masikoro will say instead "take this fishing net inside the sea" (atery añaty riaky eñy harata ifny). One person explained this difference by referring to the Vezo's position vis-à-vis the sea: "when one goes out foraging, when it's over, one returns home; but one does not return home heading westwards [towards the open sea], but heading eastward, so that from the sea one climbs up to the village".⁹ Because the Vezo imagine themselves as heading home towards the east, they perceive the sea as lying behind their back.¹⁰

From where they stand, the Vezo do not contemplate the sea.¹¹ The sea comes into their view as the bearer of what people need for their livelihood. The presence of fish in the sea seems to be taken for granted.¹² Fish differs from the "big crops" that cultivators get from their land because it is invariably in the sea, even if no-one is there to catch it. On the other hand, if people want fish they must know how to find it: if lamatsa (Spanish mackerel) are not biting, Vezo assume that they are elsewhere, which is where one should have gone to fish.

People's behaviour at sea is ruled by small prescriptions (fomba) or prohibitions (faly) that are believed to affect fishing.¹³ The only faly that I was told of was that one should never show surprise, scream or point one's finger at the sight of big creatures like whales, sharks or giant octopuses out of respect (fanaja) for them. If one acts disrespectfully towards these powerful beings, a strong wind and huge waves will

suddenly rise and endanger the canoe.¹⁴ On the other hand, relations between human beings and certain sea-creatures can also lead to success and abundance. If a mermaid (ampela mañanisa, "woman with gills") approaches a fisherman on his canoe by posing alluringly on the outrigger and he accepts her marriage offer, he will fill his canoe to the brim with huge, fat fish thereafter. Unfortunately, however, such marriages are destined inevitably to break up, for the husband always does what he was forbidden on all accounts to do: he looks under his wife's armpit, sees her gills, and the mermaid leaves him to return to the sea.¹⁵

Although the presence of fish is taken for granted, the inhabitants of Betania and to a lesser extent of Belo complain that their catches are currently much smaller than in the past, and they fear that "the fish will run out" (holany fia).¹⁶ This decline has been attributed to the increasing number of people who fish, which is blamed in turn on the fact that an increasing number of Masikoro are becoming Vezo and taking up fishing as their mode of subsistence.¹⁷

More recently, however, the Vezo have begun to look further abroad to explain their difficulties. Probably with reason, they believe that the recent, massive influx of Japanese fishing-boats is responsible for their own smaller catches.¹⁸ When the people of Betania learnt about a new law forbidding the use of small-meshed nets, they could hardly believe that the government wanted to stop

them from using such nets, when at the same time it was allowing the Japanese to "finish off the fish in the sea" (mandany fia añaty rano). The Vezo, however, are aware that they cannot compete: even if the Japanese go on trawling the fish-beds until they are completely depleted of stock, the Vezo can only "sit and look" (mañenty avao teña).¹⁹

The action of "sitting and looking" (and, as we shall see, of being frequently surprised) is typical of the Vezo, because their livelihood depends to a large extent on conditions -- the state of the sea -- that are beyond their control. The Vezo express this lack of control by calling the sea a "white" (vazaha).²⁰ The sea is not only the Vezo's "boss" (patron),²¹ but is also, as are whites, quick-tempered and violent, unpredictable and unreliable (masiake).

the vagaries of production

People's dependence on the whims of the sea is a basic feature of Vezo representation and experience of productive activities. No-one ever seemed to tire of repeating this stereotyped narrative to describe the vagaries of fishing at sea. One day the sea may be "angry" (meloke), forcing the Vezo to stay home; another day, the sea can be calm and smooth, and people will go fishing; the day after, however, the sea could well be "wild" (masiake), forcing people into inactivity and boredom (morimoritse). In winter, the canoes are beached by spells

of "southerly wind" (tsioky antimo), and at the end of the summer by rains and cyclones.²²

Even when people can go fishing they can never be sure of what they will catch. Observed from Betania, the canoes' return in the evening is spectacular. Slowly, a long strip of sea just below the horizon is dotted with tiny specks of white, that gradually increase in number and size. On the beach, women and children wait for the canoes to approach; quite soon, the canoes can be recognized by the sail's size and other distinctive features, like a coloured patch or a tear in a corner. A first possible indication of a successful catch is a canoe's distance from the shore compared with the rest of the fleet, for often a team that has had a good day will stay behind to have a last go while the others hoist their sail. On the other hand, if a canoe is known to be unusually fast, or its sailors especially skilful, it can have left the last and still come in before everyone else while carrying a good catch. As the canoe slowly approaches, the day's catch will be estimated more accurately by looking at the hull's water-line; in later tales, the canoe will be described as brimming with fish, close to shipping water because of its exceptionally large load. But even the water-line need not be an accurate clue to the day's catch, for a canoe might simply be heavy with water taken in on the way back.

The catch is not immediately visible when the canoe is beached. No-one on the beach asks how large the catch is;

no-one looks at the catch lying inside the canoe, protected from the sun by a large piece of wood. There is little talk as the fishermen jump out of the canoe and are helped by their womenfolk to unfold the sail, to take the masts down, and to lift and carry the canoe inshore. Only then, rather off-handedly, as if it were merely one of the many tasks of tidying up, the fish are grabbed by the tail one by one and swing up elegantly from under the cover.

Although no-one looks openly inside the canoe when it lands and while it is being beached, women "peep through the back of the canoe" (mitsikiroke am-porin-daka) to have a look at the catch. If it is good, they will be very happy; if the catch is poor, on the other hand, they will put no strength in their arms when they help to haul the canoe up the beach. Observed from behind, the women leaning over the rear side of the canoe to have a peep inside offer a powerful image of the Vezo response to unpredictability of fishing.

responses to uncertainty

To conclude that Vezo production is erratic and unpredictable is to some extent a truism. If there is anything that fishing communities share in common, it is that they are faced with uncertainty, to the extent that the anthropology of fishing consists to a large degree in studying the strategic responses to uncertainties in production, heightened by the virtually universal dependence of fishing communities on the market (Acheson

1981). It is notable, however, that whatever the kind of strategy that is adopted -- saving, increased planning, capital investment, information management, special crew arrangements for spreading risks, etc. -- they are pursued so as to reduce the short-termism and uncertainties of fishing.

If we return to the Vezo facing the whims of the sea with their flimsy canoes, the crucial question we must answer -- a question that concerns Vezoness, rather than economic organization -- is what scope the Vezo possess for resisting the uncertainties of fishing. Is the mode of livelihood that makes them Vezo, which I have characterized as short-term, small-scale and with no links with the past, compatible with risk-reducing strategies? In other words, how far can the Vezo plan, save and invest without becoming something other than Vezo?²³

The following two sections on Betania and Belo attempt to answer this question. The material on Betania is organized around the market and consumption; evidence from Belo focuses instead on the building of the schooners for which this village is famed all along the coast. In Betania, as we shall see, Vezoness is constructed as a deliberate and radical rejection of long-term planning. Instead of being resisted, uncertainty and unpredictability are accepted, even welcomed, and become a declaratory feature of Vezoness. The building of schooners in Belo, by contrast, marks a long step away

from economic short-termism; we shall see whether it also leads to a loss of Vezoness.

Betania

As one leaves Betania heading north, whoever one meets will routinely ask where one is going; the characteristic answer is that one is heading for the Morondava market (Q. Ho aia nareo? A. Handeha a bazary aña zahay). Although I soon learnt that this answer can be a polite equivalent to "mind your own business", most of the time the reply is truthful. Betania lies only a few kilometres south of Morondava; to reach the market one has to cross the inlet which bounds the village to the north and then walk in the sand for about a mile. The market is an integral part of the villagers' social space.

For the Vezo of Betania, the market is the indispensable link between production and consumption, for the market transforms fish into the goods that people need but do not produce. This link was didactically expounded each time I stopped to admire the fish that had just been brought back from the sea. The fish had to be taken to the market because the Vezo need to "buy money" (mivily vola) in order to buy food (mivily hany) which makes them full (vintsy) and happy (faly faly), for "it is not proper to eat only fish day after day" (tsy mety laha oma fia avao isanandro isanandro).

The role of the market in Vezo livelihood is best understood by following the comings and goings of the

women of Betania. The women leave for the market carrying on their head several huge mackerels, tied together by their heads and tails, the skin wet and shiny, the spine slightly bent over the carrier's shoulders; they return to the village carrying big, heavy baskets, half filled with rice and topped by a few tomatoes, a couple of onions, some meat or fish for the evening meal, 5 or 10 cigarettes, a small paper bag with some sugar, another with a handful of coffee beans or a tiny envelope with a few tea leaves. On top of all this, bought at the last minute with whatever money is left over from the day, there are some pieces of sugar cane sticking up vertically from the basket's sides, a baguette, some bananas, possibly a slice of godrogodro (a rich cake made with rice flour and coconut milk), a couple of mokary (rice cakes) and a few bonbom-boanio (coconut sweets).

Ideally, this movement to and from the market should take place every day. This is not so much because fish is perishable and must be sold immediately, but is more a matter of taste and customs (fomba) related to buying non-perishable goods like rice. "Vezo women like to go to the market every day" (tian'ampela Vezo mamonjy bazary isanandro isanandro) to buy the day's provisions, for they are unused to (tsy zatsy) and dislike (tsy tia) storing food at home (hany an-trano).

The way Vezo women represent their buying techniques on the market is strikingly similar to the definition of the Vezo mode of livelihood. Like foraging, goods are acquired

on a daily and short-term basis and on a small scale; by refusing to build up food stocks, this strategy also avoids creating any links with the past. These similarities between Vezo livelihood and women's behaviour in the market are drawn even closer by the causal link that people establish between the irregularity of production and the irregularity of consumption (hence of market supply) of other goods.

In other words, the Vezo assume that consumption will be lavish when fishing is successful, but that people will be "dead hungry" (maty mosare) when fishing is called off or the catch is meagre; a crisis in food supply is viewed as the inevitable outcome of a short-term failure in production.

Hunger occurs because "Vezo make a lot of money but they don't know how to 'manage' it [lit. make it work]" (zahay Vezo mahazo vola maro ka tsy mahay mampiasa vola zahay).²⁴ The Vezo boast that they "find money in the sea" (mahita vola añaty rano); their income is "money from the sea" (vola bakan-drano)²⁵. They take pride in the fact that one good catch can earn as much as an average month's wage in Morondava, or even as much as functionaries (foncionera) earn in the capital Antananarivo. But the Vezo also argue that they are incapable of managing their earnings. In essence, this means that they are unable to save: as soon as they earn some money they spend it.²⁶ Food and rum epitomize this kind of immediate consumption for short-term satisfaction. Typically,²⁷ after a good

day's catch and earnings, Vezo women will rush to Morondava to buy good, rich food like pork, beef and manioc leaves, and will top up their baskets with bread, sweets and snacks.²⁸

People are rather complacent about the Vezo's "lack of wisdom" (tsy mahihitsy) in administering their income. Sometimes they compare their eating habits to those of invisible forest creatures called kalanoro. To "eat like a kalanoro" (atao sakafon'kalanoro) means to eat up all the good food one has prepared for lunch, with no thought for the evening meal; as a result, "in the evening there is no food and one just sits around" (lafa hariva, laoke tsy misy, de mipetsaky avao teña).²⁹ Clearly, what induces complacency is the enjoyment of rich and plentiful meals rather than the evenings without food.

Squandering money on rum is considered a male prerogative. Men's drinking is thought by both men and women to play a major part in the Vezo's inability to manage money. Here also there is a certain degree of complacency about men's "foolishness", and while women complain a lot about the waste of money on drink -- money which they think could be better spent on good, rich food -- they are also remarkably tolerant of, and often amused by, male drunkenness. In fact, it would seem that in a society in which money is to a large extent kept and controlled by women,³⁰ the latter's considerable and possibly exaggerated emphasis on men's drinking as a cause of bad financial management has the purpose of including

men in the process of squandering money: women and men join to make thriftlessness a basic, non-gender-specific trait of Vezoness.³¹

Besides food and rum, the most prominent item in Vezo consumption patterns is clothing (siky). However, spending money on clothes is strongly contrasted with spending it on food, and all the more on rum. People often complain that "the Vezo just eat and stuff" (oma, oma avao ny Vezo); they will then firmly resolve that the next money they spend will be on a blanket or a sarong before the cash is used up entirely on food.³² This is because if money is available, spending it on food appears to be somehow inescapable; the only way to avoid this is to spend it quickly on something else. Clothes are an especially valued alternative because they last longer than food.³³ In what is depicted as a difficult struggle to resist immediate consumption, buying goods that last longer than food is a sign of wiseness (mahihitsy).³⁴

Although spending money on clothes is believed to be wiser than spending it on food, people also argue that this strategy actually increases their lack of spare cash; hence, buying clothes increases the chances that people will have no savings to fall back on at the next production crisis. It is considered typical that after New Year the Vezo have no money to buy food, but can be seen at the market wearing smart new jeans and shiny, synthetic dresses.³⁵

People's attitude towards this approach to consumption thus wavers between complacency about their foolishness and a sort of fatalistic complaint. Its rationale was explained to me by someone who is in some sense an outsider, a young man who worked on a sugar plantation near Morondava and whose monthly wage was equivalent to what a fishing team might earn with one day's successful catch.³⁶ He explained that he and his wife (who also earns a small income by selling small items, mostly snacks and sweets, that she buys at the market or cooks herself) have to plan their expenditure very carefully ahead, because his wages were paid in a lump sum at the end of each month. Thanks to this planning, they always have food for the day and never run out of money. The other villagers, who base their livelihood on the sea, "think differently" (heritseritsin-drozy hafa): they spend all their earnings on nice clothes and good food without saving and planning ahead because "if they have caught fish today, they hope they will catch it again tomorrow" (laha mahazo androany rozy, de manantena voho mahazo koa hamaray). In other words, they build their expectations on a constancy of fish supply, despite the fact that in other contexts they appear to be fully aware of the irregularity of supply.

Those who base their livelihood on the sea make a different assessment of wage labour. While acknowledging the advantage of a secure income, despite the rough seas or the falling rain, Vezo fishermen also strongly believe that wage labour "does not make sense" (tsy misy dikany),

because one has to work according to a rigid schedule, day in day out, under a boss and for a wage that is pitifully small compared to what the Vezo can earn from the sea. When people choose the sea,³⁷ they choose "hoping" instead of "knowing". Those who live off the sea trade the opportunity of heights of lavish consumption and the risk of periods of scarcity for the security of a regular but meagre income.

Nonetheless, every time production fails and consumption is unsatisfactory the Vezo who have chosen "hope" express surprise (tseriky). They are surprised, or even "very suprised" (tseriky mare) at having to eat a meal with a dull side-dish or with none at all; they are surprised at having no firewood to cook with; they are surprised to sit in the dark because there is no money to buy even a few drops of paraffin; they are surprised at having no money to buy medicines, at not having soap, or coffee, or coconut oil for braiding the women's hair. Much of what prompts people's surprise is predictable. The fact that the rain season follows a long period of intense heat and of very good fishing is well known; despite this, when the rains come and people are forced into inaction, they will comment that "these rains are really surprising" (mahatseriky tokoa ora ty). People as knowledgeable of weather and sea conditions as the Vezo can easily predict a spell of southerly wind, yet they find it "surprising" when it comes (mahatseriky tsioky ty). A woman was surprised when the bottom of her canoe, which had been

repaired many times and which she knew was rotting away, finally caved in; she was further surprised because she did not have a new canoe to replace the broken one.³⁸

This kind of 'surprise' is not an emotional reaction to the unknown and the unpredictable;³⁹ rather, it is a positive strategy, an act of creativity. People's disposition and willingness to be 'surprised' at every unfulfillment of their hopes about production preserves this hope and reproduces the approach to consumption I have described. So long as one is prepared to be 'surprised' when things go wrong, one can continue to hope that things will never go wrong again and act accordingly. 'Surprise' allows the Vezo to avoid learning to 'manage' money and to continue to enjoy wearing expensive clothes and eating rich food. 'Surprise' justifies economic strategies that are short-term, small-scale and have no links with the past. Although no-one ever stated this explicitly, 'surprise', as a positive alternative to planning and saving, is what makes the Vezo Vezo.

Writing about Malay fishermen, Rosemary Firth noted that "life is an alternation between plenty and scarcity. A Malay who could not plan would starve in the months when he cannot go to sea". "A typical complaint of poor fishing results [is that] 'there is just enough for food only. One cannot save'" (1966:141-2).⁴⁰ The contrast with the Vezo is considerable. Where Malays complain that they can only buy food if their catch is poor, the Vezo boast that they spend all their money on good, rich food when the catch is

plentiful. Where Malay fishing people survive because they plan and save, the Vezo claim that they often go "dead hungry" because they are incapable of either saving or planning.

Nonetheless, while it is true that the Vezo of Betania do buy fancy clothes and eat pork every time they can afford it, even at the risk of compromising future basic needs, it is also clear that they do not "die of hunger" when their fishing fails them -- like the Malays, they survive the cyclones, the rains, the spells of southerly wind and the days of poor fishing. They do so thanks to various small income-generating activities,⁴¹ thanks to assets like chickens and pigs which can be sold during a subsistence crisis, and thanks to credit networks among their relatives.⁴² Finally, the Vezo survive because saving and planning are not entirely avoided. But although men and women do in fact 'know' how to manage money, what is significant is that despite this knowledge, they choose to apply it as little as possible. Vezoness is not experienced through risk-reducing strategies but through days of hunger and scarcity and of plenty and lavish consumption, which become declaratory features of Vezo identity.

Belo

On arriving in Belo, one is struck by the large number of schooners (botsy), undoubtedly the most prominent feature of the village landscape. Some, fully rigged with masts

and sails, float in high water in the lagoon; some, in need of repairs, lie in the mud, slowly tilting to one side and losing over the years. The most striking, however, are still under construction, and look like huge skeletons branching up out of the sand.⁴³ On seeing these schooners with their inner structure still visible, made with massive pieces of the hardest, most resistant wood (nato), I began to understand why a friend in Betania had told me that "they're still Vezo, these people who build schooners, but the root of the Vezo is the canoe" (mbo Vezo olo ro miasa botsy, fa laka ro fototsim-bezo). We shall return to this statement below.

All my attempts to begin a conversation about botsy produced a lecture on the techniques of naval carpentry. As soon as my interlocutors realized that I could not follow them because I lacked the appropriate terminology, I was asked to draw a schooner in my notebook and to fill in the names and the types of wood used for each part. As I wrote these things down -- taroma, karalengo, ambao, laserake, baro, lacobo, etc. -- my teachers remarked that the terms are all Malagasy adaptations of French words. Being aware of the slight irony of teaching a white (vazaha) what had been originally introduced to Belo by another, French vazaha, people would remark that "the work of the schooners" (asa botsy) is "white's work, not Vezo work" (asam-bazaha, tsy asam-bezo).

The Vezo recount the history of botsy building as follows. The people of Belo were first taught how to build

schooners by a vazaha from Reunion called "Beibe".⁴⁴ To begin with, only a few villagers learnt the skills; subsequently, other people, wishing to build a schooner themselves, learnt the techniques by imitation. Their children followed on their footsteps, and the activity slowly spread to the entire village. Nowadays the entire population of Belo (olo iaby an tana eto) is said either to have a schooner at sea, to be building one, or to be planning and preparing to build one.⁴⁵

In order to stress the involvement of the entire village in this business, people refer to the building of schooners as "the character of the village" (toetsin-tana). This expression indicates that building and sailing schooners was already "done in the past" (natao bakañy bakañy) and that the villagers are "used to it" (fa zatsy).

As the previous narrative suggests, one learns how to build schooners through exposure to this activity, which occurs through living where construction takes place. Children in Belo play near the building sites, watch the adults' work, ask questions and help with small tasks, build their own toy-schooners "and in the end they know" (de farany, fa mahay rozy). As I stood near an unfinished schooner, my notebook filled with drawings and writing, an old man told me that in Belo shipwork is not learnt at school (tsy misy fianara), and that there are no drawings or books to learn from. The man was clearly referring to the fact that the vazaha from Reunion had left Belo to

settle in Morondava, and had opened a school there to teach the Vezo how to build botsy, a school that had even awarded diplomas. My interlocutor, in other words, was remarking how the process of learning and transmitting foreign technology had been adapted by the Vezo to their own ways of acquiring and transmitting knowledge.

Schooners, however, are not merely objects of knowledge or connotations of "character". They are the instrument of a kind of economic enterprise which is substantially different from foraging, for they are mainly employed for cargo transport along the coast. If an owner (tompom-botsy) is able to arrange journeys on a regular basis he will earn a lot of money (vola bevata). Because of the large incomes ("big crop", vokatsy bevata) they earn, schooners are seen as a kind of cultivation (fa io no sahala fambolea atao'hay eto). We saw above, that the size of the "crop" is one of the main elements marking the difference between cultivation and foraging.

On his return to Belo after a journey, a boat-owner will carry back stocks of food (rice, maize, manioc, sugar, oil) for his family. It is this abundance of "food at home" (hany an-trano) that makes people want a schooner. As the villagers pointed out, there are no markets close to Belo and it is therefore indispensable to have access to food stores.⁴⁶ What would happen if people did not have "food at home" when unfavourable conditions at sea hold up fishing activities?⁴⁷ The Vezo of Belo believe that if they did not have the schooners they would

be "dead hungry" (maty mosare) and poor (mijaly). The schooners are thus viewed as an alternative to daily exchanges on the market and as an answer to the uncertainties of foraging.

Nonetheless, everyone in Belo also stressed that despite the existence of botsy, each person still practises foraging at sea (mbo mitindroke an-drano iaby zahay). When the captain of a schooner comes back from a journey, off he will go to fish with his canoe (de roso ie, mandeha mihaza, mandeha maminta). Fishing is compulsive; "whatever happens, foraging is never given up" (na ino na ino, tindroke tsy afaky).

Foraging is not simply a side activity for boat-owners. Schooners are linked to foraging activities more substantially, for botsy are "made" through foraging (tindroke ro mahavita azy). People are proud to point out that such massive and expensive objects are built entirely with the money that comes from the sea (vola bakan-drano ro mahavita azy).

Building a schooner may last longer than the lifetime of the person who begins the work. This is possible because the wood that is used is so hard that it will last for decades without decaying, so long as it is kept out of contact with sea-water. The reason why botsy take so long to build (twenty to thirty years is not uncommon) is that the money needed to buy the building materials (up to 300kg of nails and 400 planks for a 30-ton schooner) can only be collected "little by little" (mivory vola tsikely

tsikely) by saving over daily consumption. Consequently, building is done piecemeal, a pound of nails or a few planks at a time, as small sums of cash become available.

There seem to be two ways of interpreting the links between foraging and schooners. One interpretation is that, by use of the botsy, the people of Belo substantially alter the short-termism of the Vezo traditional mode of livelihood. In order to build a 30-ton schooner through small inputs from the sea, short-term foraging is bent and transformed into a long-term enterprise. A second view of these practices might note, however, how in the hands of the Vezo a long-term, large-scale activity like building and using a schooner remains within the bounds of short-term and small-scale foraging.

The existence of short-term constraints on the process of boat-building might not seem very remarkable, for the inhabitants of Belo seem to have few alternative sources of capital investment to the small surpluses they get from fishing.⁴⁸ What is more remarkable is the way boat-owners in Belo use their schooners once they have finished building them.

A schooner must be used on a regular basis to produce a steady enough income to keep the boat repaired, pay the crew and provide one's house with food and cash. However, the people of Belo complain that finding cargo to transport is becoming increasingly difficult. The reason, they argue, is that in the past few years a few schooner-owners based in Morondava have taken control of the

freight business thanks to their influential political and commercial connections; these men now monopolize the main local shipping contracts for sugar, cement and other bulk commodities.

Nonetheless, this new monopoly has simply aggravated a situation of uncertainty that people agree existed also in the past. The main cause of this uncertainty was, and still is, the Vezo's refusal to enter into long-term agreements with the main cargo-suppliers, the Karany (Indo-Pakistani traders), because they are unwilling to relinquish their independence: "the Vezo do not like to have bosses" (tsy tiam-Bezo laha misy patron). As a result, Belo's ship-owners tend to ply the coast in search of opportunities for business they have no certainty of finding. Sometimes, for want of better alternatives and if they have some available cash, a ship-owner may be reduced to buying a load of coconuts at one end of Madagascar to sell it at the other end for a small profit. As someone suggested, using a schooner in this way is analogous to what the women in Betania do when they buy and sell fish on the beach (manahaky mpanao tongotsy reñy).⁴⁹

We shall come back to the Vezo's dislike for "bosses" in the next chapter. For the moment, let us return to the statement with which I began this section: "they're still Vezo, these people who build the schooners, but the root of the Vezo is the canoe". There is little doubt: the schooners do not make the Vezo Vezo.⁵⁰ By now it should be clear why this is so. Schooners are neither flimsy, nor

short-lived, nor small-scale. Their use is more akin to agriculture, for they deliver, or should deliver, a "big crop". In order to finance ship-building, canoe fishing is re-oriented towards a new goal, that is qualitatively quite different from everyday foraging; furthermore, "the work of the schooners" is the "work of the whites".

Thanks to their canoes, the people of Belo remain Vezo. People's insistence that no matter what the captain of a schooner has his canoe on the beach, ready to take him fishing as soon as the man returns to the village from a freighting expedition, is a way of asserting that by remaining loyal to their canoes, the people of Belo hold on to their Vezoness.

The retention of Vezoness in Belo is something more than a purely sentimental attachment to the concept, for two reasons. First, when a boat-owner takes his canoe to go 'foraging', he experiences Vezoness and is made Vezo by this experience. Second, villagers in Belo use their huge, solid and long-lasting schooners in a manner that effectively transforms the boats into rather large canoes. Vezo ship-owners do no long-term planning and have no certainty of success. The whims of the sea that feature so prominently in the canoe-owners' activities are substituted by the whims of the Karany. Unlike the sea, however, the Karany might be brought under some sort of control through long-term agreements and contracts. Yet, just as the Vezo of Betania take few steps to reduce the uncertainties of fishing, the people of Belo do just as

little to stabilize the vagaries of their commercial activities. It is thanks to this that they can claim to be Vezo.⁵¹

I do not wish to suggest, however, that people in Belo act as they do merely because they wish to preserve their Vezo identity, despite the fact that Vezoness is portrayed as a matter of choice (see below, ch.3). A study of the opportunities open to individual Vezo ship-owners to enter competitively into the freight market and become capitalist traders would probably show that such opportunities are very limited. In other words, it may well be that what the Vezo of Belo do with their schooners is nothing less than what the Karany monopsony and the near monopoly of some politically powerful ship-owners from Morondava allows.⁵² What is significant in this context, however, is that the Vezo transform their lack of resistance to averse market structures into an assertion of identity. Just as people in Betania experience Vezoness through the days of hunger and scarcity, people in Belo experience Vezoness through the long periods of enforced idleness, when their schooners lie in the docks or are grounded in the village lagoon.

Notes. Chapter 2

1. For an overview of the considerable range of variation in fishing activities along the west coast see Petit 1930:206-13.

2. "To look for food" (mila hany) is my informants' explanation of mitindroke. Dahl (1968:119) explains the term as follows: "nourriture ramassée, cueillie; mi-chercher, cueillir de la nourriture, picorer; fitindroha endroit ou l'on en cherche habituellement". Koechlin (1975) is slightly ambiguous about the meaning of the term mihake. In one context, where mihake is defined generically as "la recherche de la nourriture ... chasse-collecte" (p.23), it appears to be a synonym for mitindroke; elsewhere the term refers specifically to the predatory activity of the Vezo of Bevato, described as "chasser le poisson avec deux harpons maniés en fouène" (p.69).

3. I was told that the term mitindroke does not apply to pigs raised inside fences which are fed directly by their owners.

4. The fact that pigs and chickens are said to mitindroke suggests that the term has no implications of status.

5. See Woodburn 1982b on the contrast between immediate and delayed return economies.

6. "Whereas agricultural yield is largely seasonal, with long gaps during which no direct income is received, the yield from fishing is largely one of daily increments. Since each day's labour commonly gives its return on the spot, with no question of waiting as is inherent in the growing of crops, the fisherman's planning of production can take different forms" (Firth 1946:26; my emphasis).

7. The Vezo of Ankilifaly (see Map 1) are reported to have rice-fields (Condominas 1959); the Vezo of the area around Befandefa, by contrast, find it hard to raise anything on the clayey soil that lies between the mangrove swamp and the sand dunes (Ottino 1963). Vezo women's agricultural skills in the Mangoky delta did not impress Battistini, who argued that their careless way of sowing was due to the fact that "on attache peu d'importance au résultat de

cette culture" (1959:219). As Ottino (1963:279) wrote, "il n'est pas nécessaire d'être agronome pour se rendre compte que les Vezo ne peuvent vivre que de la mer, bien que pourtant 65% d'entre eux [entre Manombo et Morombe] s'essaient à pratiquer un minimum d'agriculture".

8. The issue of the Japanese's status was raised only in answer to my probing.

9. "Lafa mandeha mitindroke teña, de lafa vita amin'zay mimpoly teña, ka tsy moly mañandrefa fa moly mañantinana, ka bakandrano miranga an-tana" [Naboy: Belo]. It was also suggested that since the Masikoro probably view their fields in the same way that the Vezo view the sea, they must also refer to fields as lying behind their backs (amboho).

10. The fact that the open sea, which the Vezo only ever reach by accident, is called ankafohe is consistent with this visual orientation. The term ankafohe implies being in the middle of, and surrounded by the sea, so that one is unable to leave it behind one's back. Ankafohe is where a Vezo loses hope of reaching his village again (tsy velo fa maty teña, "one is not alive but dead"). My data on marine terminology do not coincide with Koechlin's (1975:30).

11. Although I do not think that my friends in Betania understood how I found the sea beautiful, this is not to say that the Vezo have no aesthetic appreciation of the sea. When I visited a friend who had left Betania to move to a large town in the Highlands (see ch.1, n. 35), I asked him whether he liked the mountains; he answered that he "would have liked it a lot better if there had been a little sea" (hotiako mare laha nisy riaky kelikely).

12. If I asked why fish came to be in the sea or who had put them there, I got a puzzled look and the tentative suggestion that Ndrañahary (commonly translated as God in the literature) must have thought of it. A different story was also told, of how people first discovered that fish was edible during a famine (fijalea). The value of fish was discovered through a process of trial and error by the Vezo elders, who tested whether the fish was edible or poisonous.

13. On magic and sorcery, see ch.1, n.19. By contrast with normal fishing, the hunting of sea-turtle (fano) involves a series of rules and taboos. Sea turtles and fish are very different: "sea turtles are not animals to be killed very frequently, for they have power; fish, however, is killed every day. Sea-turtles are not killed by people every day, but once a month or once a year" (fano, biby tsy matimaty matetiky, ka manan-kaja; fa ny fia maty isanandro, fa ny fano tsy dia matin'olo isanandro; isam'bola na isan'tao no mamono fano ny olo [Belefo:

Belo]). Fano are "difficult" (sarotsy), both because they are hard to catch and because a number of restrictions (faly) must be observed in order to harpoon or merely see them; these rules mainly define how to treat and eat the turtle after it is caught. In particular, it is faly to kill the turtle by cutting its throat (the carapace is ripped open and the meat is cut up while the animal is still alive), to cut through the chest muscles, to roast the meat, and to add salt to the cooking water (sea-water is used as a substitute); certain parts of the meat and entrails are also taboo for women and children. These faly are meant to be signs of respect for the turtle (manaja azy). If the rules are broken, the people on the canoe which caught the turtle involved will never see another one again until appropriate acts of compensation are taken by the canoe's owner.

14. There are local prohibitions, such as speaking Merina words (teny Ambaniandro) in places near Belo where Merina armies fought and were trapped and drowned by the rising tide; some marine creatures may dislike people who have eaten pork or who have light skin. Of particular note is the lack of female bans on fishing or on contact with fishing equipment. Although I never asked if menstruating women can go fishing, I was never told not to do so myself; a woman I knew went on a journey on a canoe that was normally used for fishing while she was menstruating.

15. Other versions of this story are given by Petit 1930 and Birkeli 1922-23.

16. This preoccupation differs from the realization that fish may be more or less abundant from year to year; see e.g. Ottino 1963:293.

17. My informants reacted to these worries on the one hand by emphasizing the superiority of the Vezo mode of livelihood and standards of living, which according to them explains why so many Masikoro wish to become Vezo; on the other hand, by stressing the Masikoro's clumsiness, which it was hoped would be an insuperable barrier to becoming Vezo. This rivalry between Vezo and Masikoro is reflected in the following episode. Just before the national elections of 1989, the central government decided to distribute a number of fishing nets (a gift from the Japanese government) to the Vezo population. When people in Betania heard that some Masikoro had also been given some nets, they joked that the Masikoro would use the nets to trap birds in the forest; conversely, if the government decided to distribute ploughs to the Masikoro, the Vezo would try to get a few and use them as anchors.

18. The Vezo of Betania are aware of the Japanese's destructive fishing practices, for they collect for sale on the local market the young, inferior-sized fish that the industrial fisheries throw back into the sea.

19. The expression mañenty avao teña means literally "one just looks", and conveys passivity and immobility. People accompany this saying by folding their arms and staying still as if they were sitting down.

20. As in the following exchange: "What shall we do tomorrow, are we going fishing? Ah! I don't know yet, it depends on the white!" (atao akory tsika, handeha maminta hamaray? ah! mbo tsy haintefa vazaha io!).

21. Even though employers of wage-labour are not always white people, they are invariably called vazaha because of their position of authority.

22. Men who know the sea especially well (mahay rano mare) may be able to "steal" (mangalatsy) a fishing day during the brief lull between cyclones. They are usually favoured with a particularly large catch, for fish bite most when the sky is overcast and the sea is dark. Weather conditions, however, are not the sole cause of inaction. In a diary kept for me by a member of my adoptive family, the reasons given for inactivity include, besides meteorological factors, repairs on the canoe, lack of bait, illness, tiredness (mokotsy, ta hiroro, lit. tired, wanted to sleep; reppot [repos] sur la fatigue, lit. rest on tiredness), hangovers, unwillingness (tsy mahefa, couldn't be bothered), having to attend funerals and rituals for building a tomb, other social obligations like visiting a relative, consulting a diviner, having a pekiniky (picnic) on Independence Day (see below, ch.3), taking a visitor of mine to the airport; finally, the breaking beyond repair of the canoe.

23. Writing about a community of fisherpeople in Sri Lanka, Stirrat (1989:107) notes that the identity of the people of Ambakandawila is created and expressed above all in opposition to other sectors of Sinhalese society, in particular the "bourgeoisified" middle class, in terms of a shared dependence on fishing and of similar relations with the market. He also notes that the identity of the villagers is expressed "through certain types of consumption and through a shared 'life-style'"; "to live differently was essentially to say that one wasn't really a fisherman but was trying to be something else" (1989:103, my emphasis). Although Stirrat's description appears to be quite similar to my analysis of the Vezo, he does not address explicitly the issue of what the villagers of Ambakandawila mean by "trying to be something else". This is what I try to do in relation to the Vezo notion of identity and personhood, and in developing its implications.

24. This statement was endlessly repeated to me and to my visitors, but it was also reiterated in conversations I was not directly involved in. As I explain below, the Vezo to whom the sentence refers are men, women and also

children (see below, nn.31 and 33). The use of the familiar idiom of "knowledge" and "knowing" in this context is highly significant, for it highlights the mismanagement of money as being a crucial feature of Vezoness. Not only do the Vezo not know how to manage money, they are not interested in learning how to do so.

25. At times this notion is taken literally to mean that "there is money inside fish" (de misy vola añaty fia). The man who told me this claimed that a very old and very knowledgeable man had told him that money was first found inside fish. Most people, however, disagreed with this version, explaining that to say that money comes from the sea simply means that the Vezo earn their income with fish sold on the market.

26. As will be clear in what follows, not knowing how to manage money does not exclude cleverness and cunning (fetsy) in commercial transactions.

27. What follows reproduces what I was told after being urged to observe what women from Betania brought back from the market (tsy hitanao raha andesin' ampelan' Betania lafa mimpoly baka bazary?).

28. The Vezo have a reputation among the Masikoro for the high-quality food consumption. By contrast, I found no evidence of the Vezo's alleged "fascination" for the Masikoro because of the latter's "train de vie élevé" (Koechlin, 1975:49-50). A stereotype about the Masikoro is that they have plenty of staple food (rice, maize or manioc), but that they are "poor in side-dishes" (mijaly laoke) and only eat leaves (ravy) or grass (akata). According to the Vezo, because of this "poverty" the Masikoro are eager to buy fish from the Vezo at any price.

29. These are some of the proverbs to do with food consumption: "eat well until you can because death comes at any time" (mihinana laha mbo mahita fa ny faty tsy hitahita); "eat it all up, for you don't know about tomorrow" (lanio holany fa hamaray koa tsy hainao).

30. Women control the sale of fish and decide how money is spent (ampela Vezo manao decision, "Vezo women make the decisions"). Men must ask their wives or mothers for cash to buy drink with, leading sometimes to negotiations and quarrels. For a similar situation in Malaysia see Firth 1966:26ff.

31. Carsten (1989) analyzes the gender-specificity of the handling of money among the Malays of Langkawi. After receiving cash from the men, who control the marketing of fish, the women "cook" and "moralize" the money by removing themselves from the competitive and divisive effects that the market has on the community, and by transforming "the one kind of community, based on

differentiation, exchange and alliance and primarily male, into the other, based on the notion of a collection of similar female-dominated houses" (1989:138). Parry and Bloch argue that the different use that men and women make of money among the Malays is an instance of the "two related but separate transactional orders: on the one hand transactions concerned with the reproduction of the long-term social or cosmic order; on the other, a 'sphere' of short-term transactions concerned with the arena of individual competition" (1989:23ff.). Among the Vezo the short-term squandering of money is construed as a non-gender-specific characteristic of Vezoness; men and women alike join in the second 'sphere' of short-term transactions. As I explain below, the only occasion in which both men and women save money on a major scale is when they build tombs for the ancestors. The Vezo therefore construct and experience the long-term transactional order through the planning and saving for the ancestors. In so doing, they experience something radically different from being Vezo (see below, ch.8).

32. People will sigh and say: "the money is gone; it is food that finishes it off" (vola fa lany, ka hany io ro mandany azy).

33. After helping with the shrimp-fishing described in ch.1 above, Kola, aged 14, received some money in reward from his mother, who suggested that he buy a new pair of shorts, for the ones he had were falling apart. Instead, he bought a plastic ball, which had a huge success with the other children; however, after only one day the ball hit a large spike and "died" (fa maty). Kola's mother lost no time in stating how unwise Kola had been with his money; a few hours later Kola was busy with needle and thread trying to patch his old shorts together.

34. It is generally agreed that it would be especially wise to spend one's earnings on cattle because cattle breed and increase (mitombo, mihamaro), and as a result one becomes rich (farany, fa pañarivo teña). However, this option is largely theoretical, because "the Vezo do not like to rear cattle" (tsy tiam-Bezo mihary aomby). Furthermore, they lack the skills to do it successfully: "the Vezo know about fish, they don't know about cattle" (Vezo mahay fia fa tsy mahay aomby); "the Vezo raise canoes, they don't raise cattle" (Vezo mihary laka, tsy mihary aomby). Nonetheless, cattle-raising is not entirely unknown among the Vezo. The only serious cattle-owner in Betania owned about ten cattle; a few others owned one or two, which were left to roam freely in the forest where they tended to go wild. The main cattle-owner is considered Vezo because he lives in Betania, is very talented at building canoes and goes out fishing; above all, "he is wise indeed because he knows how to manage money" (mahihitsy tokoa ka mahay mamapiasa vola ie). On cattle ownership among the Vezo see Battistini and Frère

(1958:10): the Vezo around the Mangoky delta "ne possèdent pas des bétail"; Battistini (1964): whereas "les clans de Vezo cultivateurs d'Androka et Bevoalavo [in the south] possèdent en tout environ 2000 boeufs" (p.90), the Vezo of Anakao and Soalara, just south of Tulear, owned no more than four to five cattle and a few goats, which were kept by Masikoro related to them through marriage or blood-brotherhood (p.137). Koechlin (1975), while reporting a similar arrangement in Bevato (pp.93 and 142), also quotes the following statement: "ils n'élevaient aucune bête, pas même (des) chiens [tsy nihare ty Vezo ndra alika raiky]" (p.47); however, since the speaker was probably a Masikoro, the statement may reflect the latter's perception rather than a matter of fact.

35. I remarked above that the way in which the women of Betania organize daily provision at the market is described as a matter of taste and custom. The emphasis that women like and are used to operating on the market in those ways suggests that women are aware that alternative forms of behaviour exist. If the Vezo knew how to plan and save, the market would no longer be a place where production is immediately exchanged for tasty food and nice clothes, but could be a place where short-term fluctuations in output are transformed into greater security for the future through long-term strategies of saving and capital accumulation. The case of the Vezo of Betania shows that the 'market' neither possesses a compelling power to transform people into modern capitalists, nor that it is avoided fearfully by 'subsistence peasants'. Although people in Betania view commercial activities with enthusiasm, they keep nonetheless to their tastes and inclinations and project onto the marketplace the structural features of their own mode of livelihood, most notably the short-term and small-scale orientation of foraging. For this reason, although my informants never expressed themselves in these terms, one could describe the women's comings and goings between village and market as a sort of mitindroke, a "search for food". It is also significant that the market is never depicted as a source of money: Vezo money comes from the sea. The market is merely what makes (luxurious) consumption possible, what makes people "full and happy" if only for a short time and with small things.

36. See above, ch.1 n.35 for further details on this informant.

37. Although the opportunities for wage labour are in actual fact very restricted, the decision to fish for livelihood is nonetheless perceived as a choice.

38. By contrast, the Vezo are not at all 'surprised' if the rainy season is delayed and they can continue fishing later in the year than usual. They seem prepared to believe that the recent delays are caused by American oil

prospectors in the forest, who have special guns with which they shoot at the clouds to prevent rainfall. Asked how it would be if it stopped raining altogether, a young man who loves fishing answered, with a daring look on his face, that "when it does not rain the Vezo are happy, but the Masikoro are very angry" (lafa tsy latsaky ora, Vezo ro falifaly ka meloke mare ny Masikoro). Similarly, a catch so large as to cause the loaded canoe to take on water never provokes surprise, only the grounds for glorifying tales.

39. People are also surprised by the unexpected and unknown: they were surprised first by my arrival and then by my behaviour, and they were surprised, for example, by my stories about countries where night or day last for half a year, or where lakes freeze during the winter.

40. Firth 1946:26-7 and 293-4 provides a more general analysis of saving strategies in an "Oriental peasant economy" based on fishing.

41. Such as petty trade, cooking and selling food snacks, cutting and selling firewood and timber for building houses.

42. One reason I was given to explain why individuals avoid storing food at home was that it would disappear under the pressure of kinship obligations; a similar argument might seem to apply to cash savings, which however are more easily concealed. Faced with different market structures, however, the Vezo appear quite capable of setting up food stores; see below, nn.46-7.

43. The contrast between schooners and canoes can be appreciated by noting that an average schooner loads between 20 and 30 tons, and that a 30-ton schooner is about 15m long and 3m high.

44. Towards 1905, when my oldest informant stated he was born, schooners already existed in Belo. A manuscript I was shown in Morondava by a local politician, who is also one of the most powerful boat-owners (see below), records the following information. In 1888 Albert Joachim, known as Bebe, arrived in Tulear from Reunion to teach the Vezo how to build schooners. He then moved to Morombe, where he stayed until 1890. Later he moved to Belo, where he married; finally, in 1904, he settled in Morondava, where he opened a boatyard for building schooners. Men were awarded a diploma after working for three years at the boatyard. Bebe died in Morondava in 1932. Although the title-page of the manuscript was missing, I suspect that it might have been a copy of the report by Couvert and Nockain (1963).

45. I found no evidence in Belo that "en milieu Vezo est-il reconnu comme dangereux [danger of death] d'être propriétaire d'une goélette" (Koechlin 1975:198).

46. When I arrived in Belo and told one of my new friends that I thought Belo was different from Betania because people didn't go to the market every day, he explained that "here it is the market that comes to us" (ka zahay atoy mandalo ami'hay ny tsena) - the 'market' being the carts of the Masikoro who visit Belo to sell maize, manioc and rice. The main difference between Betania and Belo, he explained, is that whereas food is always available at the Morondava market, in Belo people know that if a cart comes through today, the next one will come by only in one or two months' time. Therefore, if a person in Belo had some cash available, wouldn't she buy as much as she can, knowing that it is so difficult for food to get there?

47. The 'dislike' for storing food at home that is felt in Betania is clearly a taste that is predicated on having daily access to the market.

48. Ottino (1963:287-91), however, reported that in Morombe the Vezo built schooners with loans from the Karany (Indo-Pakistani traders) at usurious conditions. He also noted that Belo had the reputation of building schooners without Karany capital, possibly because the village is close and has easy access to the necessary timber. Ottino also mentioned that cooperatives had been set up in Belo so as to avoid resorting to Karany capital. At the time of my fieldwork, however, no such cooperatives existed, and people claimed that they avoid pooling resources because they dislike disagreements and fights (tsy fikambana ka tsy tia halifombo).

49. A study of the transport industry on the west coast of Madagascar made in the early 1960s (see above, n.44), praised the Vezo for their technical skills in building and sailing botsy. By contrast, the Vezo's commercial activities were judged unsatisfactory: "la pratique commerciale des goélettes (...) relève du tramping (...). Cette pratique conduit à voire par fois, sur un port donné, une absence totale de goélette pendant une longue période, puis la présence simultanée de plusieurs bâtiments, et en permet pas aux chargeurs éventuels de faire confiance aux goélettes quant aux transports de leurs produits. A terre, les capitaines de goélettes doivent rechercher eux-même leur frêt en faisant du porte à porte pour solliciter les clients éventuels. Si d'aventure la présence de plusieurs d'entre eux est simultanée, la recherche de frêt les conduit à essayer de s'arracher celui-ci par tous les moyens, y compris l'abaissement à un prix ridicule des couts de frêt".

50. "The schooners do not make people Vezo; it is the Vezo who get involved with the schooners" (botsy tsy mahavezo, fa Vezo ny olo ro mamonjy botsy).

51. This concept was never formulated explicitly. When in response to complaints about the difficulty of finding enough cargoes, I asked why boat-owners make no attempt to plan their activities more carefully, I was told that to do so would be "wise" (mahihitsy) but is not a "Vezo custom" (tsy fombam-bezo).

52. For a general study of the "domination commercial" by Karany in the 1960s see Ottino 1963.

CHAPTER 3

OF SOFTNESS, BONDS AND TIES

The first image I tried to capture in my field-notes a few days after I arrived in Betania was that of an elderly man cuddling a small child, the man and the child wrapped up tightly in a soft blanket. I wrote down this episode not because I thought it might be relevant to my work, but because I found the scene both calming and reassuring. A few months later, this incident would have passed unnoticed, not only because I felt safe and well established, but also because by then I took for granted both the great display of adult affection for children and the large amount of time adults spend admiring children, their acts and witty remarks. Thus, the 'softness' of the scene I just recalled did actually capture a very important characteristic of Vezoness. 'Softness' describes both Vezo relations with children and their political attitudes.

The Vezo declare that their inner nature and disposition is to be "soft" and "easy" (malemy fanahy, mora fanahy). Another way of saying this is by way of the expression "the Vezo have a soft heart" (Vezo malemy fo). Proof of these characteristics, I was often told, could be seen in the fact that Vezo always travel unarmed (tsy manday kobay, "they don't carry sticks"), showing that they have no penchant for fights; or from the fact that when Vezo get drunk, they do this only to be happy (falifaly) and act silly (adaladala), but they never become violent. Vezo 'softness' is also demonstrated by their manner of speech. Both the intonation and the speed with which they speak are described as being slow, easy, or quiet (moramora).¹

An interesting consequence of their 'softness' is that the Vezo cannot endure to have too many taboos (faly).² For example, on one occasion when I worried that I had been sitting on a doorstep (mipetsaky an-varavana), which I knew was taboo in the south of Madagascar, I was reassured that among the Vezo it is not faly to do so and that I could stay where I was and enjoy the breeze. My friends then explained that the Vezo do not like to have too many faly (tsy tiam-bezo laha misy faly maro), because their soft-natured and easy-going attitude makes them unable to respect very many prohibitions. Since faly are "difficult" things, which kill people if they are violated (raha sarotsy mahafaty olo), the Vezo would be "dead all the time" (maty isanandro isanandro). For similar reasons, the Vezo have "easy customs" (fomba mora) because they

would be unable to endure "difficult" ones (fomba sarotsy). People often told me how wise I had been to choose to work with them, because I would undoubtedly have disliked the "difficult customs" of other Malagasy people, in particular of the Masikoro.

A good example of what is meant by "easy customs" concerns the behaviour that is expected of women who give birth. During a visit to some Antandroy relatives of my adoptive family, one of our hostesses told us how she had behaved during her labour, describing how she had to keep her head and arms completely still and stay quiet throughout her pains, for such were her people's customs (fomba'hay). The Vezo women who were present reacted with surprise at the "difficulty" and strangeness of these customs (fombanareo sarotsy sady sambihafa mare). Vezo women can scream in pain, clench their fists and twist their bodies; moreover, to do so is both "good" (fa soa io) and not to be ashamed of (tsy mahamenatse). One of the Vezo women present was of Antandroy parents who came from the south to settle in Betania, where they became Vezo; this woman knew little about Antandroy customs, however, and "followed the customs of the people of the coast" (see above, ch.1); as a result, as she noted, she had become 'soft' and easy-going and would not be strong and tough enough to return to have a baby among the Antandroy.

Another example of Vezo 'easiness' that emerged during my stay is the fact that their funerals never last very long, because people are too 'soft' to endure the sight

and smell of a decomposing body: it makes them unhappy (malahelo) and sick (mamparary), and it frightens them (mampatahotsy) (see below, ch.7). The contrast with other peoples of Madagascar, most notably the Masikoro, among whom funerals last for weeks or even months, was constantly stressed. No-one ever suggested that other people are less afraid, unhappy or sick through close contact with human putrefaction; but whereas other people have the courage to endure their "difficult" customs, the Vezo "dare not, because they're too scared" (tsy mahasaky, ka mahatahotsy mare zahay).

What I have said so far seems to suggest that 'softness' and 'easiness' are categorical attributes of Vezo personhood. This would be surprising if Vezoness, as I have argued so far, were not inherent to the individual. In fact, however, the Vezo have a theory of socialization which accounts for the acquisition of 'softness' and 'easiness'.

Vezo children, it is said, have a very easy life, a life of day-long play and enjoyment. Whereas Masikoro children start work very soon, herding cattle or scaring birds away from the fields, Vezo children have little to do except at most some 'nonsense fishing' (see above, ch.1). Above all, Vezo children are spoilt, because "we people of the coast do not scold and punish our children" (tsika olo andriaky tsy mandily anaky, tsy mamohotse anaky).³ Once again, Vezo parents fail to be strict with

their children because they are 'gentle' and 'soft'. Thus, for example, if a child is rebuked and starts to cry, she will be immediately comforted and told that she should stop, because crying will make her ill (mamparary); she will be reassured in a sing-song voice that everything is now all right (fa soa io, fa soa). As a result, Vezo children grow up to be 'soft' because their parents are 'soft' with them. The latter might indeed be described as the Vezo folk theory of socialization.

Vezo children are not born 'soft' and easy-natured. These features, which are distinctive of the Vezo character, are taught, learned and, when necessary, positively enforced. On one occasion I witnessed a girl being scolded by both her parents to the point of being threatened with a fire-brand to stop screaming and wailing. I watched from a distance, shocked by this demonstration of adults' severity and roughness. By way of explanation, however, I was told that the girl was being treated this way because she had asked to be paid for delousing her mother's hair, something she had demanded many times before. This child was "hard-headed" (mahery loha), her "customs" -- the view that she should be paid for her services -- were very bad (raty mare fombany), and her screaming and wailing proved that she was "wild and aggressive" (masiake anaky io). This example proves that learning to be a 'soft' Vezo is more conflictual than the Vezo themselves would admit. At the same time, the Vezo representation of the process of socialization is very

significant. By depicting the shaping of the character and disposition of children as a smooth, unproblematic production of gentleness out of gentleness, the Vezo merely establish and confirm their pervasive (but not inherent) softness.

As the previous example suggests, being soft is good (soa laha malemy) and is in stark contrast with being "wild and aggressive" (masiake). It thus comes as no surprise that the people with whom the Vezo contrast themselves in all other aspects of their identity, the Masikoro, are reputed to be masiake. As with the process of gaining knowledge and a livelihood, the Masikoro stand for what the Vezo are not. For the Vezo, the Masikoro are always to be seen armed with sticks or axes; they are quick to use their weapons even in a minor disagreement; when they get drunk they fall to fighting and killing; they speak quickly and curtly. Even the way the Masikoro dress marks them as people who are used to living in or near the forest, which for the Vezo is an inhospitable and alien place (see above, ch.1). They always wear a blanket (siky-be) because they never know whether their wanderings in the forest will force them to sleep in the open.⁴

The contrast between 'softness' on the one hand and 'wildness' and aggressiveness on the other, has wider implications than the simple contrast between Vezo and Masikoro. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, 'softness' has an important political dimension

because 'wildness' and aggressivity are attributes of the bearers of authority.⁵ In the past, violence and brutality were associated with the Sakalava kings (mpanjaka);⁶ nowadays their role has been taken up by the representatives of the Malagasy central state (fanjakana). In between these two native expressions of authority come the whites (vazaha), whose association with power and wildness is still so strong among the Vezo that any person in a position of authority is ipso facto a vazaha, and is therefore expected to be unpredictable and uncontrollable (see above, ch.2).

By associating 'wildness' and aggressiveness with power and authority, the Vezo define themselves as a people that does not hold positions of authority. There are, of course, good historical reasons for holding to this view, for the Vezo were politically marginal in the past and are still so in the present (see above, Introduction). The Vezo, however, make a much stronger and declarative statement about their political inclinations when they say that "the Vezo dislike ties and bonds" (tsy tiam-Bezo fifeheza).

A minor incident that occurred towards the end of my fieldwork will serve as an example of what is meant by this statement. My friends in Betania had heard about rickshaws (pousse-pousse), which are in common use in larger towns throughout Madagascar, but they had never seen one. In the expectation of an increase of tourism in Morondava, two rickshaws were brought there from a

highland city. The rickshaws were new and brightly painted, and for a few days they were a major attraction for the villagers when they visited Morondava. I dislike rickshaws intensely so I took little interest in this development and in my friends' excitement, until I heard an elderly man say that he could not believe that anyone would use the rickshaws because human beings are not made to carry other human beings: "they're people, not cattle" (ka olom-belo reo, tsy aomby). If he had some heavy luggage to carry, it would be all right to pay someone to carry it for him, but he couldn't ask another human being to carry him when he still had legs to walk on. People should be afraid (mahatahotsy) of using others in this way. Although these statements were not formulated as an explicit assertion about Vezoness, I interpreted his reaction as a minor but significant example of the Vezo's profound dislike for the display and use of power over people. Although, not surprisingly, I was never provided with a coherent treatise of Vezo political inclinations, I see a strong if only intuitive link between the 'softness' and easiness of the Vezo character and their dislike for ties and bonds.

Although the Vezo dislike ties and bonds, they are aware of their existence and to a certain extent they also experience them. In the remaining part of this chapter I examine some of the 'ties' and 'bonds' experienced by the Vezo, both within and outside their community. For the

first kind of relation, I discuss marriage as an area of personal and social interaction, in which bonds and ties come into existence but are weakened by being rendered highly elastic and contextual. For the second type of bond, I discuss the way the Vezo represent their relations with the bearers of authority, both in the present and in the past.

endogenous bonds: marriage

Before leaving for Madagascar, I had prepared myself for answering the question I was sure would be raised about my marital status. In previous fieldwork experience in Swaziland, this had been the first thing people had asked me; on hearing that I was not married, wealthy men who could pay a substantial bridewealth would react by proposing to me. As I had expected, on arriving among the Vezo I was indeed asked if I was married (fa manambaly iha?). However, the question came after many others: Could I swim? What kind of food did people eat in my country? How much had I paid for the items I was wearing? On the matter of marital status, I had decided, possibly rather naively, to be straightforward and explain that I was unmarried but that I had a lover (amato) at home in Europe. People found my statement very amusing, because the existence of a lover must by definition be kept secret (see below, ch.5). In any case, it was quite clear that having a companion "on the other side of the ocean" (an-dafy) did not affect my local status -- not because we

were not married, but because his being so far away meant that our relationship had come to a halt. On the other hand, when my friend came to visit me and shared my house in Betania, people behaved as if he were my husband and treated me like a married woman.⁷

As my own experience suggests, marriage is not so much an act of status as a process and condition that lasts as long as it is experienced as such. Thus, a woman can be married today, but she may not be tomorrow if she has a fight with her husband and leaves him in rage, carrying her belongings with her; if peace is restored and the woman agrees to return to her partner, she may be a wife again a few days later.

My friends in Betania liked to impress me with the numbers of wives or husbands, lovers and children they had had. When I asked Tomy, a man of thirty, to tell me about his love affairs and marriages, he confessed to having some difficulty in remembering all the lovers he had had "here and there" (mañatoy mañaroy). We therefore agreed that he should only tell me about the women he had actually married, by performing the ritual I describe in chapter 5 below, and the lovers who had "dropped children" (latsaky anaky) of his. Tomy began by telling me about a woman he had met during a funerary wake when he was about fifteen; although she fell in neither of the two previous categories, he remembered her because she was the first woman he had sex with. Next, he mentioned the first woman who bore him a child. She delivered the baby at her

father's house; a month later Tomy performed the marriage ritual and the woman came to live with him in Betania. After a while, Tomy decided that he wanted to register the baby with the government to get a sort of identity card for him, but the woman forbade him because, as she said, "this child is not your child" (anaky io, tsy anakinao). Tomy thought these were "difficult words" (safa sarotsy); a fight ensued and he sent away the woman, who took the child with her. Soon after, he found a new lover in Lovobe, just south of Betania. The woman had a baby by him, but Tomy did not perform the marriage ritual and the woman never came to live with him. When the baby fell seriously ill, however, the mother came to Betania looking for Tomy. Tomy accompanied her to the hospital, where unfortunately the baby died. Two years later, a lover Tomy had had for a short while gave birth to another child; again he did not perform the marriage ritual for her. Three years later, a woman who had come to visit some relatives in Betania became Tomy's lover and had a child with him. Tomy would have liked to have the child live with him but the woman refused (see below, chs.5 and 6). A few months after this, Katy, who had been Tomy's lover for over a year, moved in with him. Tomy performed the marriage ritual only three years later; soon after, Tomy's last wife finally became pregnant; at present, she is still living with him.

Although I have chosen to recount the biography of a man, I could have as easily reported that of a woman who

has married and divorced five different men, and has left and returned to her present, sixth husband three times; or that of Katy, who at the age of 24 had already been married once before she moved in with Tomy and had had two children by two other lovers. As I was often told, both men and women among the Vezo have "twenty spouses" (roapolo valy) in succession. Although my informants seemed to believe that this marital instability is peculiar to the Vezo, my concern here is not with the sociological grounds for this view (which may well be correct), but with the Vezo perception of marriage and their construction of it as a non-binding relationship.⁸

The reason people give for the ease with which they leave a spouse and find a new one is that "marriage among the Vezo is very easy" (fanambalia amin'ny Vezo mora mare). Marriage, in other words, is another of the Vezo's "easy customs". The 'easiness' of Vezo marriage lies in the fact that only a few litres of rum are needed for a wedding, for establishing a union for which "the customs have been completed" (fa vita fomba). As I explain in detail in chapter 5 below, in order to perform the marriage ritual the groom and his elders must offer drinks to the bride's relatives who have gathered for the occasion. The groom's party will bring a can of locally-made rum (nañosena), a couple of bottles of legally distilled rum (toakem-bazaha) and four or five bottles of soft drinks. When Tomy performed the ritual for Katy, for example, he spent 25.000FMG, the earnings of a good day's

catch, and was praised by his in-laws for having so much drink available. Because marriage is contracted so easily (filako raiky avao, de vita amin'zay, "just one bottle and it is over"), getting married is done "just for pleasure" (plesira avao) like "going for a stroll" (mitsangatsanga amin'zay).

The ease of Vezo marriage strikes outsiders as well. When I asked Fañolana, the Antandroy man I referred to in chapter 1, what differences he found between the customs of the Vezo and those of the Antandroy, the first thing that came to his mind were the customs related to marriage. Showing surprise and disbelief, he stressed how easy marriage is among the Vezo and then lectured me on the large number of cattle and goats a young Antandroy man like him has to give his in-laws in order to marry.

Vezo men have an easy time paying for the marriage ritual, but Vezo women also take advantage of these 'easy' customs. When I described the marriage arrangements I had observed in Swaziland, where ten or more cattle are given by the husband to his wife's family, my women friends declared that the Swazi "have customs that are very hard on women" (fombandrozy sarotsy mare amin'ampela); under such conditions, they thought, the woman's relatives would force their daughter or sister to stay married so as not to have to surrender the cattle. Vezo women, by contrast, see themselves as being very unaccommodating with men. Once they have decided to leave their husband, they are prepared to say "difficult words" to those who may try to

convince them otherwise. If the woman's parents try to convince her to return to her husband against her own wishes, she will tell them that "if I die [at my husband's], I won't be your child; that man [the husband] will be your child" (laha zaho maty, tsy anakinareo zaho, fa johary iñy ro anakinareo). Faced with these words, to which I shall return shortly, the woman's relatives will stop trying to change her mind. In any case, it is not to be doubted that after two or three days a new man will come to ask for the woman in marriage (mila valy).

From both the woman's and the man's point of view, the most significant feature of Vezo marriage is that it does not bind people to one another. Thus, I discovered that my Vezo friends were the persons I had least difficulties with in explaining why my companion and myself "had not completed the customs" of marriage, and why we did not want to do so. Simply noting that in Europe we could only get married by "completing the marriage with the government" (mahavita fanambalia an-fanjakana) was a sufficient explanation. Vezo know that they can themselves register ("write", vita soratsy) their marriages with local government officials, but they do not like to do so (tsy tiam-Bezo mahavita fanambalia an-fanjakana) because it then becomes difficult to divorce (sarotsy saraky). A friend in Belo who knew a little French and liked to practise it on me, said that the Vezo prefer their own customs because they like to be libre. In this context,

Vezo marriage is seen as part of a more general manner of structuring personal relationships.

The Vezo construe marriage in terms of equality and equivalent exchange. Wife-takers (olo mangataky valy, lit. "the people who ask or beg for a wife") are emphatically equal to wife-givers: "no-one is below, no-one is above" (tsy misy ambany, tsy misy ambony). This principle of equality was clearly stated in answer to a question about the terms of kinship used by parents-in-law in addressing one another. At first I was told that they use tekno-names rather than kinship terms for address, but later I was told that the two pairs of parents-in-law are regarded as siblings because they are linked by their children's marriage. Like siblings, the two groups are equal because they enter into an equal exchange, whereby one side says: "here is my child, it is not my child but is your child" (anako ty tsy anako, fa anakinao). Marriage is described typically as a "barter of a woman for a man" (ampela takalo johary), in which the side which loses a daughter acquires a son and vice versa. The "difficult words" I quoted above refer to this act of 'barter': a woman who wishes to leave her husband warns her parents that she is no longer their daughter, for they traded her for her husband who has thus become their son.

This view of the marriage transaction rests on the assumption that men and women and sons and daughters are equivalent; I return to this issue in chapter 5 below. For

the moment, I wish to address another problem, namely that although marriage is said to be an act of equal barter, in practice it is known to be an unequal transaction. On one occasion, an old man began to expound on the equality of marriage, saying that he respects his daughter's parents-in-law because she married among them (zaho manaja androzy satsia anako nanambaly amin-drozy), and that her daughter's parents-in-law respect him because their son has married among his people (de rozy manaja anakahy satsia anakindrozy nanambaly amiko). A younger man who was repairing his fishing net nearby interrupted him, pointing out that it was also the case that "their [the old man's daughter's in-laws] begging makes you [the old man] higher" (fangatandrozy ro mañambony anao). The wife-giver is in a stronger position, because his prospective in-laws have to come and ask him to marry his daughter, and they have to come again to ask to perform the ritual whereby they obtain her children (see below, ch.6). The old man agreed with this interruption (eka, marina io, "yes, that is true"), but followed this admission with the previous statement that in marriage "no-one is below and no-one is above".

Bloch (1978) has shown how the Merina (who have an endogamous marriage system) transform the inequality between wife-givers and wife-takers into what has to be an equal relation between people who are also members of the same deme. This transformation is accomplished through the marriage ritual, which consists of a staged humiliation of

the wife-takers. In this manner, the ritual statement (wife-takers are inferior) compensates for the secular statement (wife-takers are superior), thereby annulling the objective disparities between "the side [which] gains people and the other [which] loses people" (1978:22). Although Vezo denial of the inequality between wife-givers and wife-takers occurs within a strictly exogamic marriage system, which therefore does not 'require', as does the Merina system, that wife-givers and wife-takers be equal, a close analysis of the Vezo marriage ritual (which here can only be sketched) would probably reveal a pattern quite similar to that described by Bloch.

Taking into account that, as a result of exogamy, the two sides in a Vezo marriage are not categorically equal as they are assumed to be among the Merina, we can expect that the dialectical game whereby the 'superiors' are treated as 'inferiors' must be played very carefully, all the more because it occurs between 'soft' people who dislike an overt display of power and authority. Within these bounds, however, the reference to the fact that wife-takers must come and beg for the woman indicates how they are ritually demeaned at the exact point in time when they are in a (secularly) superior position because they gain a wife. And indeed, at the very moment when the wife-takers are told that they are going to be given what they have begged for, their gain is further undermined by the woman's elders, who warn their new in-laws that the person they are receiving is "idle, wild and aggressive, stupid,

unwise" (olo ebo, masiake, adala, tsy mahihitsy). In order to avoid the consequences of their (objective) position of strength, the wife-takers humiliate themselves once more and reply that they are "weak, poor, idle, wild and aggressive, people who beat their wives and send them away" (tsy olo mahery, tsy olo manan-draha, fa olo ebo, masiake, mamango valy, mamaraky valy). Finally, the wife-takers are warned that should the woman misbehave in any way, they must never hit her but must send her back to her original family; they are receiving a woman in good condition, with good eyes and no broken bones, and they must return her in the same state.

I shall leave the analysis of the marriage ritual at this point, and will resume it in chapter 5 below in a slightly different context. In what follows, I focus instead on a theme that runs through the ritual, but which also has a significant impact on the secular life of the parties involved. This theme is that of space. In terms of space, marriage can be described as a union between "different people" (olo hafa; see below, ch.5) in which one group moves towards the other. Marriage results in a movement through space on two occasions: when the man's party approaches the woman's elders to perform the ritual, and when one partner leaves its side to join the other. The following analysis of uxori-local and viri-local marriages is intended to show how hierarchical relations are constructed in terms of these (reversible) movements.

Moving towards, as opposed to staying still at the receiving end, is what effectively lowers the first party's status.

Uxorilocal marriages are characterized spatially by the formula "the man follows the woman" (johary manaraky ampela). These are "bad marriages" (fanambalia raty, tsy soa). They go "against custom" (tsy fomba) and are "shameful" (mahamenatse). By contrast, virilocal marriages, which are assumed to be the norm, have no particular connotation.

Vezo dislike for uxorilocal marriages was explained as follows. Vezo assume that all marriages will break up after a while. When a couple has a fight and separates, either momentarily (tezitsy) or for good (saraky), the partner who has 'followed' the other must leave the couple's home. It is customary and proper (fa fomba, de mety io) that it be the woman who "carries her stuff on her head" (miloloha enta) back to her kin, for it is "shameful for a man to carry his things on his shoulder when he leaves" (mahamenatse laha johary milanja enta lafa roso mandeha); this of course occurs if "the man has followed the woman" after marriage. First by following the woman and then by having to leave home, "the man is like a woman" (mitovy amin'ampela johary ifny). I return to this point below.

Although uxorilocal marriage is stigmatized as "shameful", a closer look reveals some interesting

differences of attitude. Uxorilocal marriage is actually preferred by the man's in-laws who receive him, because they acquire a new hand, someone who can help them (mañampy azy). By contrast, it is disliked by the incoming man for a variety of reasons: the man is in constant fear of being sent away (mahatahotsy horoasiny), he has no power (tsy mana povoara) because his in-laws (rather than himself) are the "masters of the house" (tompon-trano), and he has to work too hard because his in-laws can boss him around (miasa mare teña ka rafozanteña maniriky anteña).

If a man who 'follows' a woman will be exploited to such a point, one is bound to wonder why he enters an uxorilocal marriage in the first place. The answer is that he is an idler (ebo). The only reason for a man to "follow the woman", so the argument goes, is that he is too lazy to build a house, either at his kin's place or on a vacant lot elsewhere in the village (tokotany), where he can move with his wife and her possessions. People pointed out that it is very easy (mora mare) to build a new house with a few days' hard work; Fañolana, I was told, had collected the timber for a house in less than a week. A wise young celibate (kidabo mahihitsy), therefore, will build a house well before getting married, so that when he begins "looking for a wife" (mila valy) he has somewhere to take her to. Unwise and idle young men, by contrast, lack a house of their own, which also incidentally means that

before they marry they sleep either with their lovers (see below, ch.5) or in the house of a wiser male friend.'

This explanation, as I discovered, is not entirely satisfactory. When I asked for real-life examples of uxori-local marriages, people admitted that most men who "follow the woman" come from far away, because newcomers with no local kin to rely on will prefer moving in with their partners to living isolated in a house of their own. This consideration is especially true, of course, if the man is not a Vezo and has to learn to become one. An oft-quoted story is that when a Masikoro man falls in love with a Vezo woman -- a frequent occurrence, according to my friends, because Vezo women are both beautiful (ampela Vezo ampela soa mare) and have a lot of money (manam-bola maro ampela Vezo) -- he is forced to go to live with her on the coast because she finds the interior too unhealthy and hot.

A further inaccuracy in how uxori-local marriages are represented concerns the in-laws' exploitation of the in-marriage man. This inaccuracy is most evident in the way the main male Vezo activity, fishing, is organized between a man and his in-laws. Thus, if a son-in-law shares the use of a canoe with his father- or brother-in-law, the catch is always equally divided between the two partners even if the son-in-law does not own a share in the canoe. Although this practice adheres to the general Vezo principle that ownership of the canoe, or of a net, or of any other capital asset used for fishing, does not affect

people's share in the earnings,¹⁰ one might expect that if the son-in-law's position were as weak as it is described, his allegedly exploitative in-laws would take more advantage of their position. There is in fact nothing to suggest that this is so.

Somewhat paradoxically, and in contrast with current representations, I witnessed many occasions in which sons-in-law who had married virilocally were "put down" by their in-laws. This occurs when a son-in-law visits his in-laws (mamangy any rafoza) together with his wife or alone. On such occasions, the son-in-law temporarily puts himself in the position of a "man who has followed the woman" by re-enacting his first visit, when he had to go to his in-laws-to-be to "beg" for his wife. During visits, however, his temporarily inferior status does not emerge as an overt display of authority by his in-laws; rather, it is expressed with a different tone of voice, by subtle changes in body language, by the timing and reasons for making a visit, and by the slight reciprocal embarrassment for what is recognized as being an unequal relationship.

If it is true that a man who "follows the woman" does not do so merely out of laziness and that his in-laws' exploitation seems something of a myth, we may wonder why my informants represented uxorilocal marriage as they did and why these marriages are so despised. Let us briefly summarize my informants' argument. First, uxorilocal marriage causes a physical transfer whereby "the man follows the woman"; second, the in-coming son-in-law is

afraid of being thrown out of his wife's home, he lacks power and is bossed around by his in-laws; third, he finds himself in this unfortunate position because he is idle.

This argument conceals an interesting theory about hierarchy and inequality while at the same time advocating a rather subtle response to both. Let us begin with the second point. On the one hand, people described an acutely unequal relationship between the in-marrying spouse and his in-laws. On the other hand, they introduced the notion of the son-in-law's idleness, which implicitly distorts what would otherwise be a straightforward relation of dependence, fear and exploitation. Thus, while the in-laws' superiority is supposed to rest on the fact that they acquire additional labour force, someone whom they can command and who is available to help them, their gain is significantly if not entirely curtailed by the fact that a son-in-law in that position is, by definition, lazy: instead of being an ideal super son,¹¹ he turns out to be a useless super idler.

We now see that this argument suggests that both hierarchy and inequality originate from a movement of people through space. The son-in-law is in a position of inferiority because he is a "follower", because he "moves in". The crucial characteristic of this kind of movement is, of course, that it can be rectified and reversed, and that therefore the hierarchy and inequality that it generates are equally reversible. By stressing the fact that the only reason for a man to put himself in a

subordinate relationship with his in-laws is his laziness, this theory suggests an easy way out of dependence and of a shameful power relation: stop being lazy!

The reason why the visiting son-in-law is put down by his in-laws is connected with the same 'directional' hierarchy we saw at play when analyzing uxori-local marriages. However, the visiting son-in-law and the in-marrying son-in-law differ crucially, in that whereas the former oscillates between inward visits and outward residence, the latter is stuck in one place and never moves out. Whereas the son-in-law who lives virilocally experiences the contextuality and 'mobility' of hierarchical relations, the in-marrying son-in-law experiences hierarchy uncomfortably frozen in one place.¹²

So far, I have ignored a crucial aspect of the hierarchical movement of people, namely the gender specificity of the movement initiated by marriage. Whereas uxori-local marriage is shameful because the man must move as if he were a woman, it is considered customary for a woman to move in the man's wake. Clearly, if men were considered to be identical to women, there would be no difference between uxori-locality and viri-locality, and the evaluation of who follows whom would be of no significance. Instead of asking why such gender differentiation exists, however, I prefer to analyze how such differentiation can be subverted, how men can become like women and women can become like men; how gender, in

other words, is not a categorical attribute of the Vezo person. I shall do this by showing how a virilocal marriage can be transformed, with no apparent movement in space, into an uxorilocal one.

After I arrived in Betania and began to share my meals with what would become my adoptive family, I had some difficulty in understanding the relationship between the people who frequented the house and Evarista and Liza, the two "masters of the house" (tompon-trano). As I slowly learnt to recognize people and to remember their names, I began to realize that most of the visitors were close members of Liza's family: her brothers and sisters and their spouses, her siblings' children and her mother. Only occasionally, a brother of Evarista or one of his sibling's children would drop in for a chat. Especially in the evenings, after supper, the house would become the meeting place for Liza's close kin where family matters were discussed and mulled over. One of Liza's brothers, for example, who used Liza's canoe to go fishing with her son, would come by every night to make plans for the following day's fishing; his wife, with whom Liza sold the catch, joined in when the two women had to share the day's earnings. Liza's mother came when she wanted to borrow some money or when she wished to complain about some of her enemies. A younger brother would drop in together with a brother-in-law of Liza's when they were both drunk. When Tomy (whose love affairs I described) began to think about performing the marriage ritual for Katy, he came to

discuss the matter with his elder sister Liza; the final decision was taken after a long discussion in Liza's home. Throughout these visits, Liza's husband Evarista sat in a corner wrapped up in his blanket. Most of the time he stayed quiet; if he spoke he tended to be ignored or even made fun of. He never seemed to mind.

One evening, while I was away in Belo, Evarista threw a fit of rage and for no apparent reason threw Liza out of the house with all the house's contents: bed, mattress, four arm-chairs, a chest of drawers and a sewing machine. In the dark, Liza collected all these objects together with her pig and moved to her eldest brother Gramera's home. Their relative Fañolana had just finished building a new house which was going to be used as a sleeping place by the family's young celibates; as a result of her dismissal, Liza took over the house instead.

Shortly after the event, I had to return to Betania because Liza's mother had fallen ill and it was feared that she might die. When I arrived I went to see Evarista. He had never been at ease with me. On the one hand, he seemed to be very insecure of himself, possibly because of being constantly contradicted by his wife and her kin; on the other hand, he may have thought that I was more sympathetic to them because I spent so much time in their company. On this occasion, however, as he sat alone in his empty house (all the children had decided to follow their mother), he decided that he could speak freely; for once no-one would interfere with what he said. He had thrown

Liza out, he explained, because her "heart and thoughts" were no longer in his house but were at her brother Gramera's home (fony, heritseritiny tsy ato fa aña). This allegiance was reflected in the way Liza managed the household income; instead of using the money for her own family, she preferred to give it to her siblings. Instead of discussing problems with him at his own home, she would go elsewhere and discuss them with her siblings. In sum, he was describing how his wife had transformed a virilocal into an uxorilocal marriage. Shaking his head, he told me that Liza was just like a man (manahaky johary ampela io).

After this, events unfolded as most people (including Liza) expected. A few weeks later, Evarista sent a brother, his wife (who had always been on good terms with Liza) and a neighbour to ask Liza to return home. They came at night to the home of Gramera, Liza's elder brother and the head of her family. Liza's first reaction to the embassy was to recount in detail what had happened when she was sent away by Evarista; she then turned to Gramera, saying that he should give his opinion of the matter. Gramera pointed out that it is quite usual for a married couple to fight and to decide to separate, and that no-one would wish to interfere with such a decision. Evarista, however, had behaved very wrongly (diso mare), because he had failed to take Liza back to him, her brother. Gramera stressed that according to "human custom" (fomban' ny olom-belo), a husband who has been given his wife from his in-laws must return her when he no longer wants her. Over

and over again, it was repeated, Evarista had "yet to come here" (mbo tsy niavy tato ie).

This argument was apparently judged to be reasonable by Evarista's emissaries. By way of compensation and in order to induce Liza to return home, Evarista offered his wife some money. The sum, which was not enough to buy a new sarong, was regarded however as being too paltry, and Evarista's first petition was refused. By the time I left Betania definitively a few weeks later, Evarista had sent back his emissaries twice, each time with a higher offer of cash. In a letter I received after leaving Madagascar, I was informed that eventually Liza had gone back to live with Evarista and that the two were married once again.

Although the letter gave no details of what had happened, I can guess that Evarista never formally 'returned' Liza to Gramera, nor that he went to Gramera's to take her back home. Although Evarista had sent Liza away because she had already de facto 'returned' to her brother's without physically moving house, by not formally taking her back to Gramera in the first place he had also implicitly foregone his masculine role; in other words, he had merely confirmed his subordinate position within the marriage. Evarista's subsequent behaviour followed the same pattern: had he made a move to take Liza back to him, this would have been perceived as an affirmation that she had followed him, whereas (despite his single act of rebellion) his entire behaviour was that of a man who had

been made to follow her and who had internalized his subordinate role.

exogenous bonds: Vezo and the holders of authority

The analysis of marriage as a form of endogenous 'bond' and 'tie' has shown how the Vezo construe marriage as a non-binding relationship. Marriage is impermanent: it is as easy to contract as it is to dissolve. The relations of hierarchy and inequality that marriage implies are emphatically denied in theory and are highly contextualized in practice. The view of external bonds of authority is rather different, for such external relations are far less flexible than internal ones. Outside their community, the Vezo experience power and authority that are inflexible and uncompromising. Confronted with this kind of relation, the Vezo flee.

Let us begin by examining some attitudes towards the present-day Malagasy state, its agencies and apparatus (fanjakana). National elections took place in Madagascar during my field-work. At various stages elections were called to choose new administrative committees at the district, regional, and provincial level, and finally to elect the country's President. The local candidate (whom I shall call Mimy) in one of the administrative elections was one of the schooner-owners based in Morondava who, as we saw in the previous chapter, have monopolized the cargo trade along the coast. The inhabitants of Betania, who do not own schooners, neither felt threatened nor were

affected by Mimy's activities. Nonetheless, they resented his power (povoara), his "wildness" (masiake io) and his having turned into a white (vazaha). For days before the elections in which Mimy was running would be held, the people of Betania repeated that the following Sunday they would go fishing rather than vote. True enough, when the poll stations opened on Sunday, a large number of Betania's canoes headed out to sea. For days thereafter, the villagers would boast how the Vezo prefer fishing to voting: zahay Vezo tsy mahefa mamonjy fifidiana, ka mandeha maminta tse zahay, "we Vezo can't be bothered to attend the elections, for first we go fishing".

This indifference for the workings of the Malagasy state is also expressed in the Vezo's lack of understanding of official holidays. June 26, which is Malagasy Independence Day, is known as le Vensissy (the 26th). A few days before le Vensissy, the roof of every house in Betania was draped with a Malagasy flag. Most of the flags were discoloured and frayed; still, I was rather puzzled by this apparent expression of patriotic fervour. People in Betania, however, paid little attention to my questions about these flags, for they were far too excited about le Vensissy's fair and attractions in Morondava. Finally, le Vensissy dawned, but people returned from the fair lamenting that le Vensissy used to be much more fun under French rule: older people remembered a stall with a crocodile and another with a 'fat woman' on display. That le Vensissy might have been more exciting before

Madagascar's Independence seemed rather curious; but when I asked my friends what they thought le Vensissy was, few of them knew that it celebrated Independence Day and even fewer were interested in knowing what this might mean.

Another way of looking at Vezo attitudes towards the state is to examine their views about schooling and formal education. These views are expressed quite forcefully. Every time someone expressed admiration for my abilities with pen and paper, particularly for the speed with which I could write and the length of what I wrote, they would remark that white people are very diligent in their studies (mazoto mianatsy ny vazaha). This comment would be followed almost compulsively by the statement that the Vezo cannot be bothered to study because they only want to fish (tsy mahefa mianatsy ny Vezo, ka maminta an-drano avao zahay). Indeed, one of the school's main problems in Betania was that both pupils and teachers were to be found more frequently fishing than in the classroom.¹³ Actually, what would seem to be a rather superficial statement of fact expresses a total lack of interest for schooling and formal education, which are seen to be in direct competition with the successful acquisition of Vezoness (see ch.1, n.35). Attitudes to schooling and education are closely linked to people's perception of wage labour and state employment. Like wage labour and the prospect of becoming a foncionera, schooling is meaningless (tsy misy dikany) and a waste of time.

Bloch (in press c) has recently analysed the attitudes of the Zafimaniry of Mamolena towards schooling and literacy. Although at present schooling provides the Zafimaniry with no more practical advantages than it does the Vezo, yet the Zafimaniry value both schooling and literacy very highly. Children in Mamolena go to school with enthusiasm, and are taught a kind of knowledge that is "irrelevant" but is perceived as being "categorically true". Such knowledge is valued not because of its empirical content, but because of its association with "an authoritative beyond". School knowledge is assimilated to the knowledge of the elders, which is marked by "increasing fixity and categoricity, but also [by] decreasing relevance for dealing with the environment".

If we contrast the Vezo and the Zafimaniry within Bloch's interpretative framework, the Vezo's emphatic denial of the value of schooling and education can be viewed as a more extreme version of the Zafimaniry's attitude towards the authority and knowledge of the elders. Where the Zafimaniry treat the wisdom of the elders and of the school with respect, while keeping it at arms length from practical, empirical knowledge, the Vezo seem to push the first kind of 'unpractical' wisdom, together with the authority from which it originates and that it conveys, at an even greater distance. The second half of this dissertation in which I discuss descent gives further support to this interpretation.

For the Vezo, however, categorical authority and power are not primarily located in the present-day structures of the state but are situated in the irretrievable past, at the time of the Sakalava kings (mpanjaka) and their reigns.

Baré (1977, 1980, 1986) and Feeley-Harnik (1978, 1982, 1986) have written detailed analyses of the political, ritual and ideological organization of the Sakalava (Behimisatra) kingdoms in northern Madagascar. Both scholars have approached these issues from the point of view of the central monarchy and have worked in close contact with the surviving royal families, in royal villages and at the royal tombs. As a result, relations between the royalty and their subjects are examined from the point of view of the dominators. Originally, I had planned to work on these relations from the point of view of a subject population like the Vezo. Living among the Vezo, however, soon made me realize that I was getting nowhere. The people I spoke to had very little to say about the history of the Sakalava kingdoms and very little to say about Sakalava relations with the Vezo. This lack of information, even of interest for such problems among my interlocutors is significant in itself, for it expresses a wider view of Vezo relations with outside authority. What I was told was not facts about the past, but 'history': the past as it is shaped by the Vezo into a statement about their political inclinations and identity.

To the question whether the Vezo had been subjects of the Sakalava kings in the past (nanompo mpanjaka ny Vezo?), the stock answer was that since the arrival of the white man in Madagascar there had been no more kings (mpanjaka tsy misy). Although at one level this statement can be considered an accurate assesement of the political history of the region, it is also true that the ritual and ideological power of the monarchy did not disappear as rapidly as its political structures, and is supposed indeed to be still exerted nowadays (Feeley-Harnik 1986). Nonetheless, all attempts on my part to reconstruct a 'royal past' were dismissed by invoking the European conquest, and my informants were eager to stress that the Sakalava kings' authority had terminated with their political defeat. The few times I succeeded in drawing someone's attention to the past, no consistent reconstruction emerged of Vezo relations with the Sakalava monarchy. Even this lack of a standard, codified version of events is significant, indicating as it does the Vezo's general indifference for the past, especially the royal past.¹⁴

Thus, the statement that "the Vezo had no kings" (Vezo tsy mana mpanjaka) might be followed by an admission that if a king demanded a tribute of sea turtles or fiantstva (Naso unicornis) the Vezo could not refuse, because kings were wild and aggressive and killed (mamono) anyone who did not obey their orders.¹⁵ By contrast, another informant suggested that the Sakalava kings took no

interest in the Vezo because "the Vezo have no wealth, they have no rice-fields and cattle" (ka Vezo tsy manan-kanana, tsy mana tanim-bary, tsy mana aomby). Most people, however, reacted to questions about past kings and kingdoms with the stereotyped tale of an act of defiance, which recalls my friends' reaction to national election day: "if the king came to the coast the Vezo would just take to sea, because they couldn't be bothered to wait at the village to meet him" (de lafa niavy andriaky ny mpanjaka, de roso an-driva ny Vezo, ka tsy nahefa mipetsaky an-tana mandramby azy).¹⁶ Whether this defiant flight from the mpanjaka ever actually occurred or is an invented tradition, it nonetheless expresses a fundamental aspect of Vezo identity.

Scholars like Lombard (1986, 1988), Feeley-Harnik (1978, 1982), Baré (1977), Schlemmer (1983) and Fauroux (1980) who have studied the Sakalava kingdoms with very different analytical approaches, agree nonetheless that the Sakalava monarchy created a new social order in which subject people and groups were defined through criteria that referred to the monarchy and to the history of the kingdom. As people and groups became integrated into the kingdoms, their identity was transformed and redefined as that of subjects. Royal rituals and royal works acted as crucial moments in which people were cut off from their own kin and were redefined, both physically and sociologically, by virtue of their affiliation and allegiance to the monarchy.¹⁷

The stereotyped tale with which my friends in Betania and Belo recounted past relations with Sakalava kings acquires its meaning in this political context. By taking their canoes to sea, the Vezo were fleeing mpanjaka who made claims over people and imposed political and territorial criteria to define and control them. The Vezo construct an alternative model of identity through flight and refusal of these criteria. The real or imagined act of defiance against the Sakalava kings defines the Vezo purely as "people who fight the sea and live on the coast", rather than through history, a history of outside conquest, power and domination.¹⁸

The identity that the Vezo refuse or ignore is an identity that was imposed through coercion, which defined people categorically and placed them in an inflexible hierarchy. As a friend in Belo once said, "the Vezo do not have a master, Vezo is a collective name for everyone who is able to do things all right, if they like the sea. Vezoness doesn't belong to any one person, it doesn't have a master. One can't say that so and so is the master of Vezoness. No! Everyone is master of Vezoness, if they like it and like to practice it".¹⁹ When the Vezo fled with their canoes, or when they imagine that they did so in the past, they chose and choose as their only master the sea, which may be wild, aggressive and unreliable but which does not bind and tie them.

Notes. Chapter 3

1. This character of speech is not connected with dialectal differences. People seemed pleased to point out to me that in moving from Betania to Belo I was going to encounter a "different speech" (resaky hafa), namely a different pronunciation of certain phonemes.

2. The term 'faly' is also often used to indicate a prohibition without by this implying the existence of a taboo sanctioned by custom; for example, children were warned off my belongings by telling them that they were faly for them (faly anao).

3. Koechlin (1975:46) reports that the Masikoro tell their children not to be like Vezo children, who are bad mannered (ka manao ana-bezo fa raty).

4. See also Koechlin (1975:45-6).

5. As the example of the girl shows, wildness and aggressiveness are not necessarily associated with authority: mosquitoes, pigs or cyclones can be masiake.

6. "Brutality (siaka) was one of the foremost of royal characteristics" (Feeley-Harnik 1983-84:140).

7. Thus, after my friend arrived the children in my family were told to stop calling me 'Rita' and to call me 'neny' (mother) or 'nenikely' (lit. little mother, i.e. the younger sister of ego's father or mother); I was also discouraged to teach them my friend's first name. When I asked why they could not use my name any more, they pointed at my friend and told me that now I was a "big person" (olo be).

8. For sociological studies of marriage instability among the Sakalava, see Ottino 1965 and Waast 1980.

9. Out of a total of 162 occupied houses (excluding kitchens) in Betania, 108 were occupied by couples with or without children, 26 by unmarried women with or without children, 11 by old single women, 4 by more than one

couple at once. There were 7 houses used by 44 of "young celibates" (tranon-kidabo).

10. The catch is always divided equally between the two fishermen, irrespective of who owns the canoe and of who caught the fish. Even when the canoe's owner is absent, the catch is divided equally between the two non-owning fishermen, although it is "customary" (fa fomba) to give the owner enough fish for the evening meal. The latter, however, does not receive a formal share of the catch or any money from selling the fish, because s/he has done none of the hard work. Raymond Firth (1946:256) noted that among Malay fishermen "the proportionate returns to capital and labour tend to correspond to the degree to which each contributes to the total yield". By comparison, the Vezo give no recognition to the role of capital input for the division of the catch; this fact appears to uphold my views about the economic characteristics of the canoe (see above, chapter 2).

11. In the Merina marriage ritual, the groom offers his father-in-law the backside of a sheep (vody ondry). "158y performing the ceremony the son-in-law puts himself at the beck and call of his father-in-law, he receives ancestral blessing from him, he will contribute to his father-in-law's tomb expenses but he does not just become a new son, he becomes a new super son (...). He does not just contribute to the tomb expenses like a son, he contributes even more than a son. He does not just help his father-in-law in agricultural tasks, he 'rushes' to perform them before anything else, before the bidding of his own father. He does not just give vody akoho, the backside of a chicken, he gives the vody aondry" (Bloch 1978:27).

12. The idiom of uxorilocality as it is used by the Vezo contrasts profoundly with that in use among the Karembola (south Madagascar), for whom "the idea of 'uxorilocality' is (...) a metaphor for political asymmetry", so that "uxorilocal residence is essentially a metaphor for political or territorial dominion" (Middleton 1988:111ff.).

13. Hoerner (1986:81-4) gives a completely different picture of the Vezo of Tulear: they are urbanised, highly educated and in control of many administrative posts. This may well be true, but does not contradict my own data, for as far as my informants are concerned, the urbanised, highly educated and state-employed people of Tulear are no longer Vezo.

14. Feeley-Harnik (1978:402) argues that "history is not evenly distributed because to have it is a sign of politico-religious power and authority. Historical knowledge is not evenly distributed; it is a principal means to that power and authority". Paradoxically, the Vezo seem to confirm this principle by refusing historical

knowledge in order to affirm their repudiation of authority.

15. Fauroux (1975:78) reports that "le souverain et la cour recevaient de la part de certains clans, des produits rares chez les Sakalava. C'est ainsi que trois clans Vezo, les Tsimanavadraza, les Ohimalane, et les Timangaro devaient se relayer pour que la table royale fût constamment approvisionnée en poissons de mer frais, salés ou séchés". Schlemmer (1983b:115-16) notes that subjects' tributes to the king were of little economic significance, but represented a "signe d'allégeance qu'ils ne constituaient une véritable exploitation économique par appropriation imposée d'une part importante de la production"; as mentioned in the Introduction, Schlemmer argues that the Sakalava monarchy did not base its power on the exploitation of local populations, but uniquely on the control over foreign trade.

16. See Koechlin 1975:46-8, 64, 95 for comments on the mobility of the Vezo as a means of avoiding political control. Similarly, Grandidier A. & Grandidier G. 1908-28, 1:376 n.4 noted that prior to French colonisation the Vezo were frequently pillaged by the Sakalava kings (see also Grandidier A. 1971:14), and that when they had reason to fear a raid they did not hesitate to migrate. Walen (1881-84:12) wrote that because the Vezo were few and weak they were unable resist the Masikoro attacks; if conflicts arose between the two, the Vezo took to their canoes and fled.

17. Feeley-Harnik 1982 and 1986; see also Nerine Botokeky 1983 and Chazan-Gillis 1983.

18. For the same reason, and by contrast with the Masikoro, the Vezo never define themselves as Sakalava.

19. "Fa Vezo tsy mana tompo, tsy mana tompo, fa añara ankapobe olo iaby. Ka ze mahatojo an'ny fila ty, Vezo lafa tia ny rano ty fa atao heo Vezo. Tsy añ'olo raiky, zay tsy manan-tompo zay. Ny havezoa tsy añ'olo raiky, hoe iano raiky ro tompony. Aha! Zay olo iaby tompon' ny havezoa lafa tia azy manao azy" [Belefo, Belo].

CHAPTER 4

CONTINGENCY AND PEOPLE'S MALLEABILITY

In the preceding three chapters we have looked at what people learn, do, like, dislike and choose to be in order to be rendered Vezo. To be Vezo is not to be a "kind of people" (karazan'olo), because what the Vezo are is not predicated on qualities intrinsic to them: they are not what they are because they were born to be so, but are rendered what they are by what they do.¹ A question that has still gone unanswered, however, is what is a person's relation with Vezoness once she has been rendered Vezo?

We can think of two ways in which this relation can be experienced. On the one hand, once a person has acquired Vezo characteristics, Vezoness might become the person's essence, and the process would therefore be irreversible. If this were the case, Vezoness would be transformed into an inherent set of traits of the person. Consequently, although Vezo people would be 'unkinded' at birth, they would gradually acquire characteristics of permanent 'kindedness' akin to descent.² On the other hand, a person

might experience Vezoness as a cluster of characteristics that are contingent, and hence reversible. In such a situation, Vezoness would give shape to a person's identity without being transformed into principles of descent and kindedness. As we shall see in this chapter, Vezoness is experienced precisely in this second way.

In chapter 1, I argued that the place where people reside plays a crucial role for the way the acquisition of Vezoness is conceptualized; ultimately, Vezo people become what they are because they live near the sea. The Vezo also recognize that certain "ways of doing things" (fomba)³ are associated with certain places. This criterion applies at the most general level to "the customs of the people of the coast" (fomban'olo an-driaky) as opposed to those of "the people of the interior" (fomban'olo an-tety), as well as to more localized customs associated with specific localities along the coast. In both cases the association between people and "ways of doing things" peculiar to a place is entirely contingent: "ways of doing things" stick to people and are dropped as individuals move from place to place (the issue of Vezo mobility is irrelevant, for it is the general principle that matters here).

The best example of the contingency of mores concerns the different ways Vezo position the masts of the canoe for sailing. In Betania, both masts are placed in the holes of the fañitia, a specially-designed holder which

lies on the bottom of the canoe's hull. In Belo, only the shorter mast is placed in the fañitia; the second mast is tied to the first one with a kind of slip-knot (dinikily).⁴ In both Betania and Belo people would explain the advantages and inconveniences of each system; but everyone rejected my suggestion that the use of different techniques was the result of different sailing conditions in the two areas. They insisted instead that it was just a matter of people in Betania and in Belo being used to different systems. "To be used" (fa zatsy) to something means, in fact to have become used to it: the particle fa in the compound fa zatsy conveys the meaning of an accomplished action rather than of a state of being. Somewhat tautologically, my informants claimed that people become used to sailing in a certain way because they live in a place where such a way of sailing is what people are used to; when someone moves to a different place, they adopt whichever way of sailing the people in the new place are used to.

In the light of this and similar examples that I could quote, the terms 'stick' and 'drop' that I use to describe the relation between the Vezo and the "ways of doing things" associated with where they live, are meant to stress that the link between people, the place where they live and the things they do is not substantial or irreversible.⁵ As the Vezo apprehend it, the link between the place of residence and the way people become by living there is not essentialist, and it cannot be so because it

is mediated by the process of learning; to "be used to things" is the outcome of a learning process.

As I argued in chapter 1, the place where people reside determines what they learn and it is what people learn that makes them what they are. I also suggested that the learning process is thought of as an easy 'jump' from a state of not-yet-knowing to a state of accomplished knowledge. For these reasons, what people know and therefore are cannot ever be assumed to be fixed, for the capacity to 'jump' into a new state of knowledge also easily disengages people from what they knew and were in the past.

If people who move from place to place learn and get used to new ways as they drop old ones, and if in doing so they remain Vezo, this implies that Vezoness can be experienced through many different "ways of doing things". The same conclusion is suggested by the fact that the Vezo are remarkably uninterested in marking differences between themselves, and they do not transform the awareness (and even positive appreciation⁶) that different "ways of doing things" exist into statements of distinction. In chapter 2, I gave a number of examples of various modes of Vezo livelihood;⁷ yet, despite these differences, the people of Morombe, Belo and Betania (and maybe, for all the Vezo know, even the fishermen of the Italian Riviera) all equally partake of Vezoness, although not the same aspects of it.

The recognition of Vezoness through, and beyond, existing differences in knowledge and action indicates that the knowledge and practices that make people Vezo do not consist in an orderly list of essential items, each of which contributes to the making of a fully Vezo person. This knowledge and practices are better apprehended as a blurred and loose cluster of combined elements, which combination will vary according to the locality and individual concerned. The fact that Vezoness is a rather vague and amorphous cluster of fragments of knowledge and practice not only accounts for the fact that people who live in different places which are associated with different clusters of knowledge and practices all partake of Vezoness. It also explains why men and women, who practise and know different things, are equally Vezo. I mentioned in chapter 1 that certain activities, such as the felling of farafatse for making canoes, are not considered to be a "woman's job"; similarly, men are not expected to get involved in the marketing of fish or to know much about it. When my friends in Betania first explained that the Vezo are rendered what they are by what they do and know, I began to differentiate my questions: "what is it that renders Vezo men Vezo?" as opposed to "what is it that renders Vezo women Vezo?". My informants, however, were unable to understand these questions, because they did not differentiate Vezo knowledge and practices by gender -- there is no such thing as "men's" as distinct from "women's" Vezoness. The fact that the

distinction is not drawn, however, does not follow from the fact that women know and do the same things as men, for they obviously do not, but from the fact that both men and women reach into the same vague and amorphous cluster of fragments of knowledge and practices and construct a range of different combinations which nonetheless make them all Vezo.

Despite the vague definition of Vezoness and despite the Vezo's flexibility in compounding a cluster of knowledge and practices into various, equally Vezo combinations, there is nonetheless a 'thicker' area in the cluster which is distinctly Vezo. This area is what the Vezo call "the root of Vezoness", the canoe (see above, ch.2).

This 'thicker' area produces the only significant distinction between people, that between Vezo and Masikoro. The Masikoro are seen very consistently to be what the Vezo are not. The Masikoro live in the interior, whereas the Vezo live on the coast; the Masikoro have cattle troughs, whereas the Vezo have canoes; the Masikoro know about cattle, whereas the Vezo know about fish; the Masikoro are wild and aggressive, whereas the Vezo are soft; the Masikoro speak fast and loud, whereas the Vezo speak gently; and so on. Despite this, however, the contrast between Vezo and Masikoro does not originate a boundary, whether ascriptive (Barth 1969) or symbolized (Cohen 1986); rather, it is a performative distinction which is constructed out of practice.⁸

From the point of view of the Vezo, the Masikoro are different because they know and do different things. But at the same time, the Masikoro are identical to the Vezo because they differ along lines produced and experienced through a process identical to that which produces Vezoness: for the Vezo, the Masikoro differ because what renders them Masikoro is their cattle troughs, and the lack of canoes. In fact, the possibility that the Vezo become Masikoro and the Masikoro become Vezo is predicated on the fact that Vezoness and Masikoroness are both performative identities. This also explains why a Vezo can momentarily become 'Masikoro' if he makes a mistake in sailing his canoe, and why a Masikoro can become 'Vezo' when he fells a farafatse to make a fast canoe instead of a cattle trough.⁹

As construed by the Vezo, the distinction between Vezo and Masikoro results from applying the Vezo theory of identity -- viz., that people are 'unkinded' and are constructed by what they know and do -- to all the peoples they encounter: other people are contingently other, just as the Vezo are contingently Vezo.¹⁰

To say that people are contingently Vezo does not mean to say that they are so superficially. To construct oneself as Vezo and to be Vezo as a result is not, as I hope my ethnography testifies, incidental to people's lives; rather, it constitutes people's lives.

In chapter 3, I discussed the notion that the Vezo are "soft" (malemy), and I argued that people are not inherently "soft", "gentle" and "easy", but that they learn to be so. These characteristics take shape through what is depicted as a 'gentle' process of socialization. 'Softness', in turn, is the precondition for any shape to take form: in order to be shaped people must be malleable. The Vezo, as 'unkinded' people who are born to learn and to become what they are, are by definition malleable. Vezoness is the shape they take and through which the Vezo experience their lives. By learning, doing and being Vezo, people shape themselves distinctively but also contingently: Vezoness is a shape that does not harden.

Vezoness leaves profound traces in people. This is not merely a metaphorical statement. My friends in Betania and in Belo would often proudly show me and teach me to recognize the traces that Vezoness leaves on their body - these traces are, as they say, the "signs that one is Vezo" (famantaram-bezo).

The hands of the men in Betania are scarred by Vezoness. When they go fishing and a particularly large, heavy and strong mackerel bites on the hook, the nylon fishing line cuts their fingers as they retrieve the fish. Although people are rarely injured since the line is unable to cut deep through their thick skin, the fishing line will nonetheless leave a white scar, and a sort of streaked callus gradually develops.

Fishing lines also leave other, more impressive scars on the men's waist. When a team decides to move to a different location because the fishing where they are is bad, both men will paddle the canoe, and let their fishing lines trawl in the water behind. In order to ensure that they do not miss a bite while they paddle, the men will tie the lines loosely around their waist. If the fish bites, the fishing line will wrap itself tightly around the men's waist and burn a red line on the skin. As the skin heals, the vivid red lines slowly become whitish scars.

These scars were often displayed for my benefit. When Vezo men told me that "the Vezo are not a kind of people" and proceed to explain that one is rendered Vezo by one's activities at sea, they would bring their hands forward and, slightly twisting round, point to the scars on their waist. The scars on their body, they would then say, are the "signs that one is of Vezo".

If I asked women whether they did not have "signs of Vezoness" on their hands, they would tell me to look at the hands of Masikoro women: these women have at the base of their thumb a callus from pounding maize and rice. They would then show me their own hands, pointing to their lack of any callus as the sign that they are Vezo.

When I remarked on the beauty of Vezo men, my women friends told me approvingly that Vezo men are handsome because they sail, paddle, pull up the anchor, and raise the masts to rig the canoe at sea. They also pointed out

that these activities shape men's body in a way that is both distinctive and particularly pleasing: Vezo men have small hips, a narrow waist, and wide shoulders. What is more, they do not have the kind of over-developed pectoral muscles that the Masikoro get from hoeing in the fields.¹¹

Vezo men and women can also be recognized by the way in which they walk and move their body. Because they live on the coast, they are used to walking on sand. Doing so effectively, however, requires a special technique: to avoid getting stuck in the sand one must grasp it with one's toes, while making a slightly rotating movement with one's heels. When people who are not accustomed to walking on the sand come to the coast, they look clumsy and quickly loose their breath. On the other hand, when the Vezo visit the interior and walk on hard ground, their toes get blistered because they tend to grasp the ground as if it were soft sand. If my friends were positively struck when I learnt to walk properly on the sand, they were enthusiastic when after my first visit to the interior my toes got covered with blisters, for they took this to be a display of my accomplished transition to Vezoness.¹²

By displaying their scarred hands while stating that "the Vezo are not a kind of people", the Vezo declare that they are malleable people who have been shaped and transformed by what they have learnt, done and have come to be. The scars they display mark the Vezo profoundly, but they are not permanent. Thus, people remark that when

they resume fishing after the long period of inactivity during the wet season, their fingers are soft and are more easily hurt. Once, during a rice shortage at the Morondava market, the women in Betania were forced to buy maize which they had to pound every day. They showed me their hands, remarking that they were becoming Masikoro: at the base of the thumb, a blister was starting to develop into a callus. Thus, the signs that Vezoness leaves on people's body are performative,¹³ in the same way as Vezo identity.

I mentioned in the Introduction how the extreme contingency of Vezo identity coexists with the different and seemingly incompatible principle of descent. The first part of this dissertation including this chapter, has discussed the first pole of Vezo identity, that of contingency; in the following chapters, I shall analyze the second pole, and show how the principle of descent is restricted to the domain of the dead. Chapter 5 bridges the two parts of my argument by discussing kinship among the living; this analysis is essential for understanding the subsequent analysis of descent among the dead. In chapter 6, I suggest a different approach to what in the literature have been described as descent groups, the raza; starting from the Vezo definition of the raza, I argue that 'descent' should be seen as a shadow cast by the dead on the living. Finally chapters 7 and 8 describe 'descent' as the experience of being dead. Through the analysis of ritual action, I examine how the living

construct the raza as the domain of the dead, how they relate to this domain, and how they imagine the dead's wishes and their longing for life.

Chapter 4. Notes

1. Linnekin and Poyer (1990) note, in the context of their analysis of Lamarckian models of identity in the Pacific, that 'ethnicity' (both as the Western popular theory of group identity and as a theoretical construct developed by Western social scientists), postulates that "people are as they are because they are born to be so" (1990:1 ff.). When applied to people like the Vezo, who are not as they are because they were born to be so but are rendered what they are by what they do, 'ethnicity' ceases to be a viable concept. I am not the first one to suggest or to imply, however, that 'ethnicity' is a problematic concept for studying group definition in Madagascar. See Southall 1971 and 1986 (on how to distinguish common and differentiating features among Malagasy groups); Wilson 1967, 1971 (on the Tsimihety); Huntington 1973a (on varying degrees of discreteness of ethnic labels); Eggert 1981 and 1986 (on the Mahafaly); Lambek 1983 (on negative definitions of group identities); Hurvitz 1986 (on the definition of embrouchure culture); Bloch in press b (on the Zafimaniry).

2. For a discussion of descent within Lamarckian models of identity, see Leiber 1990.

3. The term fomba refers to ways of doing anything, including a certain way of fishing, cooking, eating, talking, offering food to the ancestors, marrying, giving birth, etc.

4. My informants suggested that practices in Betania and Belo are representative of differences between the northern and southern coast as a whole.

5. See Watson (1990) for an example (the Kainantu of Papua New Guinea) of cultural identity acquired through learning and practice, but in which a localized character is instilled and infused in people by imbibing local waters and ingesting local foods. In this case, people who move to a different area from where learnt to be what they are "bring their old ways with them" (1990:31).

6. Both in Belo and Betania, people were keen to point out the different ways in which people in different places are Vezo.

7. As I mentioned in the Introduction (n.4), such great variability prompted J.Poirier (Association 1969-70, fig.21) to deny that the Vezo exist as an ethnic group and that their "mode de vie" is of any significance in defining who the Vezo are.

8. Linnekin and Poyer (1990:8-9) use Sahlin's notion of "performative structures" (1985) as applied to cultural identities which "are made as well as born".

9. One may usefully compare the Vezo/Masikoro pair with the Shan/Kachin pair in Highland Burma analyzed by Leach (1977). Shan and Kachin are associated with two distinct environments and specialized forms of cultivation: "wherever there is a stretch of country suitable for wet-rice cultivation, we either find Shans or we find no one at all. (...) And vice versa in localities suitable for taungya cultivation, we find either Kachins or no one at all". Thus, Leach argues that "it is only in those localities such as the Hukawng Valley where we encounter Kachins cultivating rice by Shan methods that we can infer with any probability that Kachins have 'overrun' or ousted a Shan population. And for that matter, if we encounter Kachin speaking people cultivating rice by Shan methods, it might almost be inferred that these 'Kachins' are already well on the way 'to becoming Shans'" (1977:37, my emphasis). After accounting for the historical and structural process which gives origin to the oscillation from Kachin (gumlao via gumsa) to Shan, Leach goes on to claim that "the Kachins and Shans actually think of their own society in this sort of way. Kachins themselves tend to think of the difference between gumsa and gumlao and the difference between gumsa and Shan as being differences of the same general kind. Further they recognize that these differences are not absolute - individuals may change from one category into another. Kachins speak of people 'becoming gumlao' or 'becoming Shan'" (1977:285, my emphasis). Therefore the difference between Kachin and Shan is not "a difference of ethnic, cultural or racial type" (1977:286). Although the similarities between this picture and my own of the Vezo are striking, yet there is also a striking difference, which is that Leach is describing a historical process which affects and transforms people within certain structural constraints. I describe instead a contingent process of creation and transformation of identity, in which individuals are thought to be able to activate their own "personal structure" by choice, learning and practice.

10. Whether Vezo or other, the contingent contrast I describe here remains a contrast between people. As to the contrast between people and non-people (biby), I never

thought of asking what it is that renders people people, to enquire into the nature of this contrast. I became aware only after returning from the field that this question has been asked and answered in Lambek's book on Mayotte (1981:150), where "a madwoman who wandered the countryside in rags (...) repeated with approval by those who heard her: manka ulunu ulunu, ulunu, 'what makes a person a person is [other] people'". Although my understanding of the Vezo distinction between people and non-people is too limited to allow me to speculate on it, the fact that people like the Mikea (a group of hunters and gatherers) were defined by my informants as "people who are becoming animals" (Mikea reo, olo fa mihabiby), suggests that the distinction cannot be assumed to be categorical. On the Mikea see Fanony 1986; for an interesting case of a group of hunter-gatherers's identity as "mediator, code-switcher, interstitial" see Kratz 1980.

11. Both Ottino 1963:279 and Koechlin 1975:45 note the distinctive physical features of the Vezo, but both explain it in terms of racial characteristics; for a description of the "rubber muscles" of a Vezo sailor, see Canestrini 1989.

12. Once again we see that by performing Vezo activities anyone can become Vezo herself. By way of contrast see Rousseau 1990:51: "'Kayán' [central Borneo] can mean different things in different contexts because it is not always used as an ethnic term in our sense. When, after a year of fieldwork, I was told approvingly that I walked like a Kayan, reference was being made to my adoption of some cultural traits, not my ethnic ascription". Since the Vezo never use the term 'Vezo' as an ethnic tag, and never make "ethnic ascriptions", when they said that I walked like a Vezo they meant that I had made myself into a Vezo.

13. Circumcision (which leaves permanent scars on men's body) is remarkably unimportant among the Vezo, as the literature reports (Ottino 1963:279; Lavondès 1967:21 n.3; Faublée 1954:65). In view of Bloch's analysis of circumcision among the Merina (1986) and of my analysis of descent among the Vezo (see below, ch.6), the scarce importance of circumcision among the latter seems to confirm that for the Vezo the scars left on their body by their performative identity as living people are more important than the scars left by the blessing of the ancestors.

CHAPTER 5

KINSHIP AMONG THE LIVING

Dadilahy (grandfather) is a very old man (fantitra be). He does not know when he was born, but he thinks it may have been in 1905. Dadilahy is very tired (rerake mare); he spends his days sitting in front of his house, which his grandchildren (zafy) built for him a few years ago. His main daily occupation is making knives out of scraps of iron that his grandchildren find for him. He hammers the iron on a flat stone; every now and then he stops to recover his strength, and sometimes he falls asleep over his work. His grandchildren tease him because he spends more time sleeping than hammering, so it takes him many days before he finishes a blade and can start work on the handle. Although dadilahy can hardly walk the distance from his house to the kitchen, which is only ten metres away, he says he would like to go fishing if only he could find a companion. At this, his daughter reminds him how weak his legs are and how bent his back is. But a few

hours later, in the evening, a small audience gathers around dadilahy, who begins to recount one of his many adventures at sea as a young man. He describes the details very accurately: the nature of the wind, the current, the waves and the position of the sail. His audience strains to hear his low and feeble voice, for the stories are always engaging. His grandchildren say that he is a good story-teller (mahay mitantara ie).

Dadilahy knows other stories as well. He knows how people come to be related to one another, "what makes them longo" (mahalongo an-drozy). Dadilahy knows a lot about filongoa (kinship) because his great age has allowed him to follow the creation and expansion of filongoa over many generations.

In Belo, I spent hours talking with dadilahy, often interrupting his work since he was unable to talk and hammer his knives at the same time. Mostly we discussed kinship. Dadilahy began by explaining how the audience that gathered in the evening around his house and the people who brought him scraps of iron for his knives had come to be his grandchildren. Then, he explained how these grandchildren are related to each other because they share him as a source of generation. In the first instance, dadilahy made me look down at his descendants from where he stands; in the second instance, he showed me how his descendants look up towards him. In both cases he was describing a system of kinship that grows bilaterally and ignores differences of gender. As we shall see, in its

ungenderdness and undifferentiation filongoa draws no distinctions of 'kind' between people. The 'unkindness' of filongoa is akin to the 'unkindness' and the contingency of Vezoness -- both constitute the domain of experience of malleable, transformable and live persons.

When dadilahy looks down at his descendants he has a vision of growth and expansion. He looks at his children (anaky), at the children generated by his children (zafy), at the latter's children (kitro), etc. As his sight moves downwards, dadilahy draws no distinctions between his descendants: his sons are equivalent to his daughters, his sons' children are equivalent to his daughters' children, and so on further and further down the generations. Dadilahy views all his descendants indistinctly as grandchildren; in so doing, dadilahy construes the link between himself and his descendants as an ungendered relation. In his view, filiation is non-gender specific.

The converse of dadilahy's view is that of his grandchildren, who look upwards and recognize him as their ascendant. For the young boy who comes with a scrap of iron, dadilahy is the man who generated the woman who generated his own mother; the woman from Betania who visits him when she goes to a funeral in Belo recognizes dadilahy as the man who generated her father. When dadilahy's descendants look upwards, they trace him along the same ungendered paths that dadilahy follows to embrace them as his grandchildren. In the descendants' view,

parenthood is non-gender specific: to have been born by a woman and to have been born by a man is equivalent insofar as they trace their ascendancy back to dadilahy.

The ungendered view of dadilahy's grandchildren moves upwards through their two parents, their four grandparents, their eight great-grandparents,¹ and so on. Just like dadilahy's vision, theirs is a view of growth and expansion branching out to reach an ever increasing number of ascendants. Although the path that leads to and beyond dadilahy is merely one of the many that each of his descendants draws upwards from themselves, the grandchildren who gather in the evening around the old man are related to each other as longo insofar as one of their many paths of ascent intersect in dadilahy.

Dadilahy was a very patient informant. If I asked meaningless questions, he would patiently explain why they were meaningless. When he felt I wrongly assumed I already knew about certain things, he would gently direct me to ask what he thought I had not fully understood. On his part, he seemed always to understand fully what my questions implied and answered accordingly. Even dadilahy, however, became exasperated when I began to discuss kinship with him. Taking a large notebook with me, I asked him to outline all his longo, everyone he was related to; I asked him for their names and for their relation to him. He looked at me in disbelief. How could I possibly imagine

that my paltry notebook would be even vaguely sufficient to describe all his longo?

As it was, I should have known better, for the most common remark I had heard about Vezo kinship was that "the Vezo have very many longo" (Vezo manan-dongo maro mare). To be longo means that one has been generated by the same people. Two persons are ampilongo (reciprocal longo) if they or any one of their ascendants "share a mother and/or father" (miharo neny, miharo baba). Josy and Leky, for example, are ampilongo because the father of the mother of Josy's father was a brother of the father of the father of Leky's mother. As dadilahy pointed out, the Vezo have many longo because they are related to people on both their father's and their mother's side (amin'ilan'babanteña, amin'ilan'neninteña), in other words, because filongoa is ungendered.

Another way of describing the process whereby the Vezo come to have so many longo is by noting how new filongoa is established when a new generation of descendants is born by marriage. Marriage can only occur among "different people" (olo hafa), that is among partners who are not longo.² The Vezo emphasize the fact that marriage does not erase the "difference" between oneself, one's partner and all of one partner's longo. This means that in-laws do not become longo. On the other hand, when "different people" generate children, new filongoa is established, since both parents are longo of their offspring, and all the parents' olo hafa are transformed into longo of the children:

parents-in-law become grandparents, sisters- and brothers-in-law become mothers and fathers.³ The transformation of "difference" into filongoa means that "people's longo increase all the time" (longon'olom-belo mihamaro isanandro isanandro), because "if one has children, one's parents-in-law become one's children's longo" (laha latsaky anaky teña, rafozanteña manjary longon'anakinteña).

The transformation of olo hafa into longo is the key to the expansion of filongoa. However, this development can only take place through the medium of marriage, for only by acquiring olo hafa can the latter be transformed into one's children's longo.

Young people, I was told, "make love with no purpose" (mandranto fahatany). If a girl becomes pregnant and does not want to marry her lover (or vice versa), the child will be an "outside child" (anaky amonto), a term that refers to the fact that the child is outside marriage. The child will have a mother but will lack a father (tsy mana baba), and will thereby lose one side of its potential kinship ties.⁴ Marriage instead blends motherhood and fatherhood into ungendered parenthood and assures that each generation acquires a "father's side" as well as a "mother's side", both of which will provide undifferentiated filongoa.⁵

Marriage nonetheless expresses a profound contradiction. On the one hand, marriage is the

precondition for the growth of filongoa, which is predicated on the equivalence between men and women, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters; on the other hand, Vezo marriage proves that men and women are not equivalent.

We saw in chapter 3 that gender is contextual: women can behave like men and men can behave like women. However, if gender were actually and entirely non-specific, if men and women actually were undifferentiated, one logical consequence would be that both women and men could bear children. Yet men cannot normally do so, as Vezo folk biology makes quite clear. Men cannot become pregnant because they have no place in their bodies where to collect "women's sperm" (deron'ampela, the vaginal mucus) to produce a baby; female sperm "falls out" (atompamonto) and is lost. It is the woman's body, by contrast, tha receives the male sperm (dero), houses it and expands to make room for the phoetus; the woman's womb is a "straw basket" (fisia), which is small when empty and expands as it is filled.⁶

Under certain exceptional circumstances and despite their physical limitations, Vezo men can become pregnant; yet such occasions are no cause for rejoicing. Male pregnancy (hanimboky) is perceived as a grave and serious danger, an illness (arety) that can even cause the man's death. A man sick with hanimboky is unable to "shit or pee" (tsy mangery tsy mamany), and his stomach swells until it resembles the belly of a pregnant woman.

Hanimboky means "pregnant with food", and is brought about by food that the male kin of a sexually active woman accepts and eats from a daughter or sister⁷. This food (but also water, cigarettes and sweets) is dirty (hany maloto), because it is assumed that the woman has acquired it with tangy, the present her lover gives her in compensation for her sexual services. When a male kin accepts food from a daughter or sister, it is as if he received food from her lover, which would amount to receiving tangy from him. Men say that if a man accepted food from a daughter's or sister's lover he would be put in a very inferior position (mañamabany azy mare) by the latter. Although this was not explicitly stated, it would seem that if a woman's male kin accepted tangy they would be putting themselves in the position of being compensated for having had sex with their daughter's or sister's lover.

Both Vezo women and men emphasize that hanimboky only happens to men; eating tangy-like food does not affect a woman's female kin. For example, a woman may use tangy to buy a few packets of chewing tobacco for her mother, but she will warn her how they were come by so that the mother can make sure that none of her daughter's male kin gets any. Women can eat food associated with other women's tangy because women are alike (sambiampela tsy mañahy), and they are alike because they have similar sexual organs (sambility iaby).

The reference to female sexual organs in the context of male pregnancy explains what sort of 'pregnancy' hanimboky is. The sexual organs that make women alike are what allow them to receive male sperm and reproduce. By contrast, the male body has no such opening and has no 'basket' where a baby can grow. Male pregnancy, therefore, occurs through another opening in men's body, their mouth, through the ingestion of food. But since the food men receive from a daughter's or sister's lover is 'dirty' because it has been bought with tangy, male pregnancy is dirty too -- the male belly does not swell up with babies but with shit and pee. Consequently, men are exposed to hanimboky because they are not the same as women, although their daughter's or sister's lover treats them like as such.

Every night Vezo villages are traversed by the soft movements of young men (kidabo) wrapped up in blankets; when it is safe, they knock at their lover's door and are silently let in. Early in the morning, well before dawn, they leave as secretely as they came. As long as the woman's male kin are unaware of the relationship ("they do not see it", tsy hita maso) no affinal links are established between the man and his lover's kin. It is in these circumstances that the woman's male kin are in danger of hanimboky.

When the man secretely enters his lover's house, the woman's kin do not 'see' him; of equal importance, however, is the fact that he does not 'see' them. By not recognizing them, he treats them as extensions of the

woman he has sexual relations with to the extent that he threatens them with becoming pregnant. The position in which the woman's kin find themselves as regards the intruder can best be described with the image of a little boy, who falls ill with hanimboky because he sleeps with his mother while she has sex with someone other than the boy's father; in such a case the boy is nearly literally at one with the woman's body, for he sleeps curled up behind his mother's back (miroro amin'lambosin'neniny). If the little boy were a little girl, however, "it wouldn't matter" (tsy mañahy) and hanimboky would not ensue.

The threat of hanimboky can only be averted if the lover recognizes his affines through the marriage ritual. Such recognition is initiated when the lover himself decides to "come out in front of his father-in-law" (miboaky am-rafoza) and to "beg" (mangataky) for the woman. The ensuing ritual performed by both lovers together puts an end to the threat of hanimboky. This ritual consists of two parts. The first part, which I examined in chapter 3 above, consists of the putative husband's elders "begging" (fangataha) of the woman; the second part (soritse) I discuss below. The danger of hanimboky ceases after soritse is performed.

Soritse takes place at the house of the eldest of the wife's kin and is done by tracing vertical lines of "white earth" (tany foty, chalk) on the stomach and right-hand biceps of all the woman's male longo, including classificatory sons and male children had from other men;

women are never smeared unless they are pregnant, in which case the tracing is done for the (hypothetical) male baby they bear. Soritse is performed by the couple together, after the chalk has been dissolved with a little water in the woman's palm; the man traces a line on the men's stomach, the woman on their biceps. As they do this the two recite a formula, either "that you may shit, that you may pee" (mba hangery, mba hamany) or "that the food coming from my hand may bring you good" (hahasoa hahatsara anao ny sakafo baka ny tanako). When everyone has been marked, the men on the woman's side accept for the first time 'food' -- in this instance rum and beer -- from the woman's husband, now become a son- or brother-in-law or classificatory father. Although the bottles of rum, beer and soft drinks brought by the husband-to-be are in full display throughout the ritual, the woman's elders ignore them, for none of the woman's male relations dares consume anything offered by her partner before soritse is completed. Only after tany foty has been smeared do the woman's elders accept an envelope with some money from their new son-in-law and drink his rum.

Soritse averts the danger of hanimboky; thereafter the woman's male kin can eat food offered by their son- or brother-in-law with no fear of becoming pregnant.⁸ The formulas uttered while the couple traces tany foty on the men's belly (the belly which was in danger of swelling up) and on their right-hand arm (the arm with which 'dirty food' would have been accepted) refer to the causes and

symptoms of hanimboky; women are not smeared because they are immune from hanimboky itself. Tany foty, I was once told, is like a medicine (fanafody), because it transforms food which was dirty (hany maloto) into "food made healthy, that has been cured" (hany voataha). Transformed into healthy food, the drinks the new son-in-law offers are a "gift" (fanomeza). What used to put the woman's male kin in a position of inferiority vis-à-vis the woman's lover is now received as a token of respect.

The transformation of a deadly threat into a token of respect is a useful clue for understanding an aspect of the ritual drama that is enacted both before and during soritse. In chapter 3, I employed Bloch's analysis of Merina marriage ritual to argue that when the lover comes to 'beg' for his wife, the persons who are in a position of inferiority in secular terms (the wife-givers) are made superior in ritual terms, so that the final outcome expresses equilibrium and a relation of equality. Hanimboky and soritse express similar dialectical denials of secular reality through ritual devices.

In the ritual arena, the woman's lover is transformed from an aggressor who threatens his potential in-laws with a deadly disease into a lowly visitor who begs for the woman and offers gifts to his in-laws in token of respect. We saw in chapter 3 that when the son-in-law is ritually 'down' he is also secularly 'up': although he 'begs' and pays his respects he is actually taking away the woman from his in-laws. If we apply the same principle to the

situation in which the son-in-law-to-be is ritually superior, we can expect to find that when he threatens his lover's male kin with hanimboky he is also in fact in a position of secular inferiority.

The young men who slip into their lover's house in the darkness of the night are often made fun of by older people. These poor young men must run in and out (lomay lomay) to avoid being caught by their lover's kin; they run so hard that they lose their breath (sempotsy). The joke revealingly depicts the lover in the position of an incomer (in this case of an intruder) similar to that of a man married uxorilocally, a "man who follows the woman" (see above, ch.3). The joke suggests that the lover is forced into such a position until he recognizes his in-laws. Thus, whereas through the threat of hanimboky the lover treats the woman's male kin as if they were women, in secular terms he is himself like a woman who follows 'her' partner into 'his' house. In the end, the two threats compensate and annul each other. Although the threat that the lover poses to the woman's male kin is acute and deadly it is also bound to be called off, for the ritual aggressor has all the interest in becoming a ritual beggar in order to take the woman away with him and become the father of the children she will bear him.

Let us now return to the growth of filongoa, which is where we began to contemplate the possibility that men are so much like women that they become pregnant. The analysis

of hanimboky has shown that this possibility exists, but that it provokes a dangerous disease that can only be offset with the marriage ritual, whereby the lover recognizes his in-laws and the latter recognize him. While averting the danger of hanimboky, however, this recognition also denies that man and women are the same, that fatherhood and motherhood are identical. At the same time, this denial ensures that children acquire both a father and a mother, and that they transform the affinity created through marriage into undifferentiated filongoa. Paradoxically, therefore, marriage blends motherhood and fatherhood together into ungendered parenthood, while it also proves the existence of gender differentiation.

When dadilahy looks down at his grandchildren and when his grandchildren look up towards him, they observe the final product of marriage, ungendered filongoa, while ignoring what marriage also recognizes: that gender differentiates people. Yet gender is not the only principle of differentiation among the Vezo. The Vezo are also divided into 'kinds' (raza). It is to this wider image of differentiation that I now turn.

Chapter 5. Notes

1. These eight great-grandparents are also the "eight raza" (valo raza) to which people refer when asked what their clan affiliation is; see below, ch.6.

2. Huntington 1978 discusses the "operational limits" of the category of hava (equivalent to the category of longo) among the Bara, a group of pastoralists in southern Madagascar.

3. The distinction, stressed by Ottino 1963 (and employed by Lavondès 1967 and Koechlin 1975), between close and distant kin (foko and longo) is not recognized by the Vezo. Similarly, my informants strongly denied that the 'close' relatives of ego's spouse become ego's longo (as suggested by Ottino); Koechlin 1975:32-3, by contrast, states that it is not marriage but the birth of offspring that creates kinship ties (and consequently marriage prohibitions).

4. Koechlin 1975:134 defines anaky amonto as children who have not been acquired by their paternal lineage through the ritual of soro; see below, ch.6 and n.39.

5. Although marriage among the Vezo is extremely unstable (see above, ch.3), relations of affinity created by marriage are not equally fragile. If children are born, affines who have become longo of one's children remain affines (mbo atao rafoza, mbo atao velahy, "they're still called parents-, or siblings-in-law") even if the marriage breaks up, according to a pattern found throughout Madagascar (Southall 1986:419).

6. I discussed Vezo views of procreation mainly with women. Asked what 'puts' the child inside the woman's womb (ino ro mampisy zaza añatiny sarotson' ampela?), my woman friends stated that only the male sperm (dero) is responsible for forming the child, and that sperm received during pregnancy makes the child grow strong; a woman should have sex as late into pregnancy as she can. Sperm received during pregnancy also affects the child's shape; if a pregnant woman has sex with a different man from the one who first 'put' the child in her womb, the child's features will take after those of the lover, who is said to "steal" (mangalatsy) some of the child's looks. The woman makes no contribution to the 'placing' of the child

inside her own body. It was never suggested, for example, that menstrual blood contributes to the making of the child, and only in one instance did a woman suggest that menstrual blood might form the placenta. Women provide the foetus with a "house" (trano), of which the placenta (tranon'zaza) is the constitutive part, and are responsible for nurturing the foetus with food; the baby sits upright, its head at the height of the woman's chest and its mouth open to ingest what the mother swallows, especially fat and tasty foods (tsiron-kany). Female cravings (mafovaly) are due to the child's desire for certain kinds of food; it is crucial to fulfill the woman's desires, for else the foetus will die. When the baby is born, its bones (taola), muscles (hosatsy) and fontanelle (hevo) are soft (malemitemy), but they get hard (henja) as the baby is fed on its mother's milk.

7. On this point see also Koechlin 1975:135.

8. Lavondès 1967:59ff. gives a different interpretation of the ritual of soritse among the Masikoro.

CHAPTER 6

THE SHADOW OF THE RAZA

... the shapeless mass of darkness he had lifted split apart. It sundered, and a pale spindle of light gleamed between his opened arms, a faint oval reaching from the ground up to the height of his raised hands. In the oval of light for a moment there moved a form, a human shape: a tall woman looking back over her shoulder. Her face was beautiful, and sorrowful, and full of fear. Only for a moment did the spirit glimmer there. Then the sallow oval between Ged's arms grew bright. It widened and spread, a rent in the darkness of the earth and night, a ripping open of the fabric of the world. Through it blazed a terrible brightness. And through the bright misshappen breach clambered something like a clot of black shadow, quick and hideous, and it leaped straight out at Ged's face. (Ursula Le Guin, A Wizard of Earthsea).

Anthropologists who have studied Malagasy kinship systems seem to have asked the same question of all their informants. Southall wrote of his inquiry among the Betsileo:

I was exploring the raza [clan] affiliation of some children whose mother was divorced and living with her father, who was also divorced from her mother. This is a common situation and apparently always has been. I was asking the same question that Lavondès asked in Masikoro: [ino] firazananao, what is your named ancestry, or kin group? The answer was that children belonged to their mother's father's group in which they were living, but that when they went to their father's group they were members of it, and if their mother took them to her mother's people they were members of that group. They thus claimed membership in three kin groups, like many Masikoro. There was certainly a different frequency in their activation of these memberships, and later they might choose one almost to the neglect of the others. But all claims were of the same kind and equally good (Southall 1971:147).

In Betania and in Belo I asked the same question that Southall had asked the Betsileo and Lavondès (1967) the Masikoro. But when I asked my informants to tell me what their raza was (ino razanao?), I met with complete

failure: people simply refused to name the raza they belonged to. Rather puzzled by my ignorance, they told me that they were Vezo.¹ Since I felt that this could not be the 'right' answer, I assumed that people had not understood my question. I therefore tried to explain what I meant by mentioning a couple of Masikoro clanic names (Manidrano, Marofoty, Voroneoke) which I found quoted in Lavondès's work. At this point, someone suggested to ask "what is your raza?" (ino razanao?), and then, on receiving the answer "Vezo", to add "Vezo in which way?" (Vezo manao akory?). Yet, despite having learnt how to formulate the question correctly, I still failed to obtain an answer; people would just give me a wise smile or laugh embarrassedly. In fact, what I had taken at first to be a non-answer was the 'correct' reply: "(living) human beings have eight raza" (olom-belo valo raza), the eight raza of one's great-grandparents.

This statement takes us back to what Southall was told by his Betsileo informants. When he asked what the children's firazana was, the answer he got came very close to what I got when I asked "what is your raza?". Southall was told that the children belonged either to their mother's father's group or to their father's or mother's group, according to where they happened to live; the three groups are included in the eight raza mentioned by my informants. Since it is quite probable that if the Betsileo children discussed by Southall went to live with the group of their FF, MM or MF, with the group of their

FFF, FFM, FMF or FMM, or finally with that of their MMM, MMF, MFM or MFF, they would belong to these groups also, they would resemble the Vezo in claiming membership of eight raza of "living human beings".

The fact that people can claim membership of eight raza is discussed extensively by Lavondès (1967) in his work on the Masikoro of Bekoropoka. Lavondès suggests that a Masikoro actually possesses more than eight raza, for his/her eight great-grandparents have in turn eight raza each, and this exercise can be pursued in a process of infinite regress: "un homme possède des appartenances claniques innombrables" (1967:41).² Lavondès therefore faced the problem of showing how, in the interplay between unilineal and cognatic descent, one descent group is chosen among the theoretically infinite number which every individual can claim membership of. Thus,

il faut bien qu'il existe un principe pour l'élimination des sept appartenances claniques des arrière-grands-parents qui sont en surplus. En théorie du moins, c'est le principe patrilineaire qui permet de venir à bout de la difficulté, car parmi les huit appartenances claniques d'un homme [sic], il en est une qui est plus importante, celle qu'il tient de son père, et c'est celle-là seule, toujours en théorie, que les arrière-grands-parents transmettront à leurs arrière-petits-enfants (1967:41);

the preference for patrilinearity is only 'theoretical', however, because people can choose to affiliate themselves to their maternal raza, if this is more prestigious.³

A basic problem with Lavondès' interpretation is the difficulty of understanding the actual meaning of raza membership when we are told that people have eight raza (i.e. that descent is cognatic), but that they only belong to one (i.e. that descent is unilineal). While being caught up in this terminological confusion, Lavondès appears to recognize the problems it raises when he identifies a 'nuance' in the meaning of the term raza as the Masikoro understand it. This is said to differ slightly, yet crucially from what anthropologists customarily mean with the term 'clan'. The latter, according to Lavondès, refers to "l'ensemble des individus qui font partie [du clan]", whereas the Masikoro "entendent plutôt le mot firazana avec la valeur d'appartenance clanique" (1967:99). Somewhat mysteriously, he concludes that "dire qu'on fait partie de tel clan, ne signifie pas du point de vue masikoro qu'on fait partie d'un ensemble d'individus qui portent ce nom, mais qu'on se rattache à une certaine catégorie ainsi désignée" (1967:99-100). Yet, at the end of all this we still want to ask, what does this 'attachement' actually mean? What is the difference between an individual's attachment to his/her innumerable clans and his/her attachment to the one clan to which s/he is affiliated?

Lavondès' subsequent attempt to explain that clan membership is transmitted both cognatically and unilineally, by attributing different emphasis and persistence over time to paternal as opposed to maternal filiation (1967:100-1), has been described by Southall as a "hallucination derived from male perspective or patrilineal bias" (1971:148). The hallucination is certainly due to the fact that Lavondès' framework of analysis sets definite constraints on the kinds of questions that one may ask. As Southall recognizes in a more recent publication, "discussions of the social organization of Malagasy people has focused a good deal on whether they are predominantly cognatic or agnatic (...). It now begins to appear that this debate may have been misconceived" (1986:417).⁴

In this chapter, I suggest that the way out of both hallucinations and misconceptions is to abandon the debate about cognation, agnation and their interplay entirely, and quite simply to examine the cultural definition of kinship categories such as raza, asking what it means to be a raza member, and when and for whom membership is or becomes relevant.⁵

"people of the past who are dead"

My informants gave a very simple definition: the raza is "people of the past who are dead" (olo taloha fa nimaty). The association between raza and death is recurrent. Dead bodies, especially of old people, are referred to politely

as raza. The term for tombs (lolo) also refers to the ancestors.⁶ One addresses the raza by turning to the east (antiñana), where tombs customarily are. Although the first time my adoptive father introduced me to his ancestors he explained what he was doing, I was able to understand only a sequence of equivalences: raza = dead people = tombs or cemeteries = the east, where the cemetery lies (raza = olo maty = lolo = antiñana aňy, an-dolo aňy).

Vezo tombs consist of fences (vala), each of which contains a number of bodies buried not very deep under the sand (see below, ch.8). The people buried within the same fence are referred to as "one people" (olo raiky), or as "one kind of people" (raza raiky). Raza membership is thus best understood as membership of a tomb.⁷ Membership is clearly exclusive, for a person can only be buried in one tomb, inside one fence, with one "kind of people".

If the raza is located inside a fence within the cemetery and is constituted of "people of the past who are dead", it makes little sense to ask a living person what her raza is, since so long as she is alive affiliation to a raza is no concern of hers.⁸ To ask this question is also inappropriate and causes unease, because discussing people's raza affiliation is akin to discussing the prospect of their death.⁹

We can now briefly return to the statement that "living human beings have eight raza" (olom-belo valo raza). If we take the statement to be about descent groups and clan

membership it appears to contain two absurdities. First, it suggests that raza membership can be shared between eight different groups, which we have seen is impossible, for raza membership is restricted to only one tomb. Second, if we take the term olom-belo in its literal sense of "living people", the statement suggests that "living people" are raza members; this is equally impossible, for as we saw raza members are "people of the past who are dead". Taken together, however, the two absurdities correct each other. When my informants told me, in answer to my inappropriate question about their raza membership, that "living people have eight raza", they were stating that as living beings the choice of a descent group is not yet their concern. In other words, they were implying that the only people who could answer my question are the dead, who are fenced inside the tombs and indeed constitute the raza.

More simply, the fact that "living human beings have eight raza" can be seen not as referring to raza membership (either of the living or of the dead), but as a statement about the undifferentiated source that has generated the living: the eight raza are the eight great-grandparents who generated the four grandparents who generated the two parents who generated each living human being (see ch.5 above).

While I argue that raza membership only concerns the dead, I am not implying that the living completely ignore the

raza; if they did so, they would have no cemeteries, would dump their dead and would not visit them, as the Hadza are reported to do (Woodburn 1982a). In other words, if the living Vezo were to ignore the raza entirely, they would not build the tombs that create and contain the raza to be joined at their death. Far from this, the Vezo regard it as their duty to build tombs and crosses for their ancestors because the dead are unable to do so themselves (see below, ch.8).

Although the living join their raza only at death, the raza breaks through, like a shadow, into their lives, to anticipate and prepare the moment when it will take over completely. What needs to be prepared and anticipated is the choice that the living as such do not yet make, the choice of the one raza and the one tomb which they will become members of. This process is accomplished through the ritual of soro, whereby the raza momentarily overshadows the living and establishes their future destination in a tomb; yet the ritual has no effect on people's filongoa, on the eight raza of living people, in that it makes no discrimination between these raza of any significance to the living (see above ch.5). The same shadow resides more permanently in the hazomanga, the person who mediates between the raza and the living. In the following two sections I analyze the ritual of soro and the hazomanga. In the last section I adopt the point of view of women, which I argue is biased towards life and

against the raza: instead of a shadow, we shall be looking at handsome, healthy and living people.

soron'anake

Soro is a ritual offering to the ancestors. Soron'anake (the soro of the child) is the offering of a head of cattle or of rice by a father to the elders of his children's mother. I have never seen this ritual performed,¹⁰ and I shall therefore not attempt to describe it. I shall analyze instead what the ritual (or the lack of a ritual) accomplishes. I heard people discuss this issue so often that I found myself asking whether soro¹¹ had been performed for such and such a person before I even realized what the question meant.

People ask whether soro has been performed by Iano's father when Iano¹² dies. The answer tells people where Iano's body will be kept before burial, who will be the "master of the corpse" (tompom-paty; see below, ch.6), and above all where Iano will be buried. If Iano's father has performed soro (laha vita soro), Iano is buried in the father's tomb,¹³ the father's elders¹⁴ are the "masters of the corpse", and the body is kept at Iano's father's home before being taken to the tomb, where his raza is informed about the newcomer. By contrast, if Iano's father has not performed soro (laha tsy vita soro) he has no rights over the corpse; Iano is buried in the mother's tomb,¹⁵ the mother's elders are the "masters of the corpse" and Iano joins the mother's raza.¹⁶

If soro is delayed, but is expected to be performed sometime in the future, people say that "soro has not been done yet" (mbo tsy vita soro).¹⁷ In this situation, if Iano dies without soro his father can nonetheless "beg for the corpse" (mangataky faty) from his in-laws. If they give it to him (laha manome faty), it is as if Iano's father had performed soro, and the father becomes Iano's new "master" (tompq). At the same time, however, by begging for and receiving the body Iano's father recognizes that his in-laws are the true "masters of the corpse" (rafozany ro tena tompom-paty). The possibility of begging, giving, refusing and receiving the corpse blurs people's apparently clearcut allocation to tombs and raza which soro theoretically provides; I discuss this point further below.

What Iano's father begs from his in-laws when Iano is dead is identical to what he would have asked had he performed soro when Iano was still alive. In both instances, Iano's father asks to "buy the raza" (mivily raza). When Iano is dead, the request means, quite literally, to buy Iano as a corpse; when Iano is still alive, to "buy the raza" means that Iano be surrendered by the maternal to the paternal raza.

What does this acquisition entail? What does the fact that Iano is surrendered by one raza and acquired by the other mean? One person put it this way: "starting from this moment [the moment when soro is performed], the man has the children. If he hasn't performed soro, the man

doesn't have them; it is the woman, the mother who gave birth to them, who is the children's 'mistress'. But if the man has performed soro, it is he who is the children's 'master'. [pause] For example: one of the children dies; if the father has not performed soro yet, the child is buried in the mother's tomb. But if the child dies and soro has been performed, the child is buried in the father's tomb".¹⁸ What is most notable about this passage is that the example that follows the pause recurred at every conversation I had or heard on the topic of soro.

What a father 'buys' by doing soro can be stated even more clearly. I once overheard a discussion whether some people might think that it makes no difference if they perform soro or not, because a father is not barred from having his children live with him even if soro has not been done. However, as a man explained very firmly, this is a wrong way of looking at things, because through soro "one doesn't buy the child's mouth or the child's flesh; what one buys are the child's bones" (tsy mivily vavany, tsy mivily nofotsiny, fa taola ifny ro nivilin'olo).¹⁹

If soro 'buys' the child's dead body, the ritual can be imagined as being an anticipation of the child's funeral. It would be interesting to analyze the ritual's performance from this perspective to see whether the close association between soro and death is expressed in the ritual itself; unfortunately, as I mentioned above, I lack the data to engage in this analysis. There are, however, two aspects of the general organization of the ritual

which support the view that soro concerns people's allocation to tombs and their raza membership which occurs only after death.

Firstly, among the Vezo soro is performed at the elders' of the child's mother. The maternal ancestors are informed that the child is being "given" (manome) to the father, who from now on will be the child's "master" (tompon'ajà). Lavondès reports that among the Masikoro a second soro is performed at the father's elders': "le but du sacrifice est d'informer les ancêtres de l'entrée dans le lignage d'un nouveau membre" (1967:65; my emphasis). In both instances, the offering is provided by the child's father.

My informants claimed that among the Vezo the second soro is not enacted.²⁰ Some of them suggested that this was because Vezo are too poor to afford buying two expensive cattle to perform two rituals; by contrast the Masikoro, who raise cattle, can afford to do so. Others were convinced instead that the second soro is a specific custom of the Masikoro (fomban'i Masikoro avao, tsy fombam-Bezo), whose significance they themselves found it hard to understand (ino dikany?, "what's the point?", "what does it mean?"). One man said that there could not possibly be two soro (soro tsy roe, lit. "the soro aren't two"), because if a second soro were performed, who would be the "master" of the child? (ia ro tompon'anaky ty?). In this case, my friend could only imagine the second soro as repeating the first one, thereby inverting it: with the

first soro, the mother's group surrenders the child and the father 'buys' it; with the second one, it is the father's group that surrenders the child and the mother who buys it. The end result would be that no-one knew whom the child belonged to. Although this man's understanding of the two soro as performed by the Masikoro is mistaken, because the second ritual has the function of restating the child's acquisition by the father's group (rather than reversing the first transaction), the misunderstanding provides a clue to why the Vezo only perform the first soro and do without the second.

As Lavondès suggests, among the Masikoro the second soro is an acquisitive ritual in which the paternal ancestors are informed that the child is entering their raza. On the other hand, the first soro is a ritual of surrender, in which the maternal ancestors are informed that the child has been 'sold'. The fact that the Vezo consider it necessary to perform only the first soro and are unable to understand the need for a second one, suggests that through soro they only surrender rights over children, rather than acquiring them.

The reason why the Vezo are concerned only with the first soro is that for them the ritual concerns the allocation of corpses to tombs, rather than the allocation of living persons to groups. For the Vezo the first soro is indispensable to mark the maternal group's surrender of its rights over children's future dead bodies. On the other hand, a second soro marking "l'entrée dans le

lignage d'un nouveau membre" cannot take place, because acquisition occurs only when children enter the raza as dead people. For the Vezo a second soro would be redundant, because the paternal raza will be informed about acquiring a new member when the person is buried in the raza's tomb.

The second aspect of the ritual I wish to discuss is the existence of two types of soro, which are distinguished by the type of offering presented to the maternal raza. On the one hand, if the woman is still pregnant of the first child of the man who wants to perform soro, the father-to-be can perform soron-tsoky (lit. "the soro of the belly"). In this case, he must provide 20 or 30 kapoaky (a tin of Nestlé condensed-milk) of rice.²¹ On the other hand, if the child is already born, the father must perform soron'aomby (lit. "the soro of cattle"), in which case the father must present his in-laws and their ancestors with a head of cattle.

The fact that soron-tsoky is far cheaper than soron'aomby is of course recognized, as is the fact that an increasing number of people try to perform soro when the woman is still pregnant. In order to be allowed to do soron-tsoky, however, the man must first ask for his in-laws' consent by "asking, or begging, for the belly" (mangatake tsoky).²² Acceptance is not straightforward. The in-laws can refuse the father's request for a variety of reasons, such as the fact that soron-tsoky is taboo for

the woman's raza (faly amin'raza); or else they may simply want to be difficult (miola), either because they dislike the man or because they feel that he does not respect them enough (tsy manaja any rafoza ie). On his part, the father may prefer to wait and sustain the expenses of soron'aomby, because it is generally assumed that soron-tsoky has "no fame" (tsy malaza); this means that when the man's children die, people will be less likely to remember whether soro was performed or not.

At one point I asked whether soron-tsoky is a valid substitute of soron'aomby or whether, as is reported in the literature on the Masikoro, it is only a first step which must be followed in all cases by soron'aomby.²³ My informants' first reaction was to refer once again to the fact that the Vezo are too poor to buy cattle and are therefore quite happy to consider soron-tsoky a substitute for soron'aomby. They also however gave another, more interesting explanation for the use of something cheaper than cattle when the woman is still pregnant, which is that the unborn child "is not a person yet, it's an 'animal'" (mbo tsy olo, fa biby).²⁴ This point was developed no further, for my informants found the fact that a child is worth more than a biby too obvious to discuss. Nonetheless, the cheaper rate seems an acknowledgement of the fact that by doing soron-tsoky the father is being compensated for the risk that the biby he acquires may not become a person.

The recognition of the difference between acquiring a biby and acquiring a person is not in contrast, as might at first appear, with the argument that soro entails the acquisition of the child as a corpse-to-be rather than as a living person. The phrase "it's not yet a person, it's a biby" is used to explain why babies of less than a year²⁵ are given an unmarked burial, typically under a large tree in the forest, rather than being buried in tombs (tsy milevy an-dolo). Little babies are "water children" (zazarano), are "soft" (malemy) and therefore are unable to stay upright. Only when they start sitting up (fa mahay mipetsaky) do they become "people" (fa olo), who can therefore be buried in a raza's tomb. "Water children" are not buried in tombs, I was once told, because they have no bones (taola tsy misy):²⁶ for burial is "the gathering and the preservation of bones" (fanajaria taola). This explains the risk a man incurs when he performs soron-tsoky. The risk is not the fact that he may acquire a biby instead of a baby, but rather that he may acquire a corpse that will be too soft to be buried in his tomb.

To sum up, the ritual of soro is an offering to the ancestors whereby a man 'buys' the raza for his children, thus ensuring that they will be members of his raza. Membership of a raza, however, does not affect the "children's mouth" or the "children's flesh", namely their condition as living people, but only the destination of

their bones, for the children become members of their father's raza only when they join his tomb (which is his raza).

My friends often told me that "corpses are what make people fight" (faty ro mampialy olo). When more than one raza makes claim to a corpse,²⁷ people like to say that the contenders should cut the body up in two, leaving one faction with the head and the other with the feet (tapa roe, raiky mahazo lohany, raiky mahazo tombokiny); but this is intended only as a joke, because bodies cannot be cut up in this way. Raza membership is uncompromisingly exclusive. Death forces a choice of where a person is to be buried, hence of her raza. The ritual of soro prepares and anticipates this choice.

I find it useful to think of this preparation and anticipation as a shadow, a shadow cast by the raza over living people. The children for whom soro is performed, who are surrendered by one raza and acquired by another, do not actually leave the first raza or enter the second one, because as living people they do not belong to any raza at all. Yet, when the ritual takes place and the children are treated as if they were already bones, a shadow is laid on them, like an imprint that marks their ultimate destination in a tomb and a raza.²⁸

the hazomanga

There is one person among the living who will become members of the same raza for whom the shadow is more than

a superficial imprint. This person is the hazomanga.²⁹ The hazomanga has usually been defined in the literature as the "chef du clan" or "chef de lignage" (see for example Lavondès 1967 and Schlemmer 1983), or as "l'ainé de la génération la plus ancienne" (Ottino 1963:43). The hazomanga, in other words, is defined as the eldest living member of a descent group. However, since we know that the group of which the hazomanga is allegedly the "chef" is constituted only by "people of the past who are dead", it is more accurate to view the hazomanga as the person who is the closest among the living to becoming a raza member.³⁰ From this perspective, the hazomanga is both the eldest of the living members-to-be of the raza and the youngest of the ancestors because he has not yet joined them.

By being both a senior among the living and a junior among the dead, the hazomanga is in a position to mediate between the raza and the living. Consequently, as an acquaintance pointed out, "the dead do not have a hazomanga" (olo maty tsy mana hazomanga); since the dead are already part of the raza they no longer need the hazomanga's mediation. In his guise as mediator, the hazomanga talks to the raza (mañambara an-draza), offers food to the ancestors when they are hungry (misoron-dolo), and presides over the soro (misoro an-kazomanga). Last but not least, the hazomanga is "the master of the tomb" (tompon-dolo) and "the master of the corpses" (tompom-paty) that are to be buried in his tomb. He informs the

ancestors that the living will build a new home for them (see below, ch.8), or that a newcomer is joining them inside their tomb (see below, ch.7).

People frequently remark that to be a hazomanga is very dangerous and difficult (sarotsy mare), for one is constantly in danger of dying. If the ancestors are unhappy or upset by the wrongdoings (hadisoa) of the living, their anger will most probably fall on the hazomanga; the outcome of the ancestors' rage is described most effectively as maty 'sur place', "dead on the spot". Besides being exposed to the ancestors' wrath, the hazomanga is also in an intrinsically dangerous position, for by being the closest living person to the raza he is also the closest to the tomb and to death. Paradoxically, however, the fact that the hazomanga is the closest to the raza is contradicted each time he presides over the burial of a person younger than himself. As "master of the corpse", the hazomanga leads into the raza people who should have died after him. When the hazomanga buries a young child, he states that it is "not right" (tsy mety) for him to bury a grandchild (zafy). While this statement expresses the grief of an old man who has seen too many people die too young, it also shows how the hazomanga views his position in relation to the living and to the raza: if things were "right", he would be the first to join the raza and he could only preside over his own funeral.³¹

Let us return to the shadow that the raza casts over the hazomanga. I shall examine it by analyzing the shape that the hazomanga takes in the region where I worked. While this shape is to a certain extent unusual, it has the advantage of making the shadow sharper and more clear.

Although I have referred so far to the hazomanga as a person, the hazomanga is in fact a sharpened wooden pole sticking upright in the sand, while the person is known as the "holder of the hazomanga" (mpitan-kazomanga). The distinction between the hazomanga (pole) and the mpitan-kazomanga (person) is recorded unanimously by the literature. The wooden poles are raised to commemorate an offering to the ancestors, whereas the person who holds the hazomanga is the head of the descent group.³²

When I arrived in Betania (but the same applies to Belo), I wandered around the village in search of the sharp wooden poles, but found none. At first I assumed that there were no hazomanga in this village, and took this to be a sign of the Vezo's peripheral position in the Sakalava kingdoms.³³ However, once I began to understand the language better I noticed that the word hazomanga came up frequently in people's conversations: so and so had approached the hazomanga (namonjy ny hazomanga zahay); meetings were held at the hazomanga's (mivory an-kazomanga); messages were sent to it (mañambara any hazomanga tse zahay). I slowly realized that people made no distinction between hazomanga and mpitan-kazomanga, between the object and the person, and that when my

friends in Betania mentioned the hazomanga they were referring to a person rather than to an object. The first time I asked an hazomanga where the wooden poles were, he paused, straightened up, and with a dramatic gesture pointed to his chest: his body was the hazomanga (vatako ro hazomanga).³⁴

The fact that there was no hazomanga-object in Betania was explained as a result of intense migration from one's place of origin:

among the Vezo there exist only a few of these sharpened hazomanga; what makes them a difficult and dangerous thing is that people here are not really their 'master', but are substituting someone who is far away. This is why people don't have the standing hazomanga. If one were the 'master' like those Masikoro over there ... they are 'masters' of the hazomanga, their raza is there and nowhere else, they don't come from afar, and when one [mpitan-kazomanga] dies another replaces him, when one dies another one replaces him. But the Vezo are people coming from far away and the 'master' of their raza, their hazomanga, is not here but has been left there, there, there [pointing to the south]. Only the children, only the grandchildren move over here, and so people cannot raise the sharpened pole over here because its real 'master' is still there, is still far away over there.³⁵

In Betania, everyone referred to the south as the place where they or their forefathers had originally come from. This is why, when offerings are made to the ancestors, the first piece of meat or handful of rice is thrown southwards. As the previous quotation suggests, the south is also where the sharpened hazomanga still stand.

I wish to stress at this point that my informant's account is not interesting for its factual content or its accuracy. Whether the Vezo of Tulear make offerings to the ancestors in front of sharpened poles and whether they have maintained a distinction between hazomanga-object and hazomanga-person is not at issue.³⁶ The interest of the account lies in the gesture of an old man, and of all the other Vezo hazomanga I met, who can state by pointing to himself that it is his body that is the hazomanga. Bloch's (in press b) recent analysis of the process whereby Zafimaniry gradually merge into places and become features of the landscape provides significant analogies and contrasts with the Vezo. The Zafimaniry view the forest as an amoral, uncaring, uncontrollable environment. Within it, human life is fragile and impermanent; it can acquire permanence by leaving a mark on the landscape. One of the ways to do this is through successful human reproduction, which produces houses made of the hardest and most durable wood. After the death of the original couple that founded the house, the latter lives on and is increasingly beautified and made increasingly permanent by the couple's descendants. Slowly the house becomes a "holy house" and

replaces the original couple, or more precisely the original couple becomes the house. The ancestors undergo a similar if more permanent transformation into megalithic stone monuments erected in the forest. In both instances, the ancestors become long-lasting objects merged into the landscape. Bloch (unpublished) has also described the very hard and straight walking sticks carried by the Zafimaniry elders. Hardness and straightness are associated with ancestorhood: the walking sticks are the hardness and straightness that the shrivelled and bent bodies of the elders visibly lack. Thus, when the Zafimaniry talk about the hardness and straightness of an elder, they are not actually talking about him but about the walking stick that he carries: the elder has become the walking stick.

This transformation of the Zafimaniry elders into walking sticks may be usefully contrasted with the Vezo hazomanga. On the one hand, the Zafimaniry project the elder's body onto an object with the characteristics of ancestorhood; by carrying and identifying with the walking stick, the elder anticipates his disappearance as a living person and emphasizes his slow transformation into an ancestor. The Vezo, on the other hand, having left their hazomanga far away in the south, have projected instead the object onto the body of the elder. Although the Vezo elder's body is, of course, just as bent and frail as that of the Zafimaniry elder, it is also more significantly a body that is still alive. Instead of a process in which elders become objects and thereby adhere to the hard and

straight order of ancestorhood, as is the case among the Zafimaniry, we find among the Vezo that the object that stands for the hard and straight order of ancestorhood is made to coincide with impermanent, mobile people. Whereas the Zafimaniry seem to be trying to insinuate permanence into life, the Vezo introduce the fluidity of life into the fixity of ancestorhood.

Both solutions to the tension between life and death are problematic; if not, it would mean that either the Vezo or the Zafimaniry had discovered "a way of having life without death" (Bloch 1985:645). Bloch has pointed to the paradox of the Zafimaniry's attempt to fix people into places, namely that in the process of transforming people into objects the people lose their peopleness. The solution adopted by the Vezo is less paradoxical than dangerous: if life insinuates itself into the fixity of ancestorhood, this also means that in the body of the hazomanga the fixity and permanency of descent becomes contiguous to life. As a result, the old Vezo man carries the shadow of the raza inside his body: when the shadow takes him over completely, the hazomanga is "dead on the spot".

Although my use of a localized transformation (the merging of the hazomanga-object with the hazomanga-person) to draw general conclusions about how the Vezo construe the relationship between life and death, between impermanence and permanence, between living people and the raza might

be criticized, it draws support from the preceding analysis of soro. In both cases the raza can be seen to linger over people's life while remaining outside it. By establishing people's place of burial, the soro ritual determines people's future raza affiliation. Within this ritual "living people" (olom-belo) are treated as if they were raza members, thereby preparing and anticipating their transformation into "people of the past who are dead" (olo taloha fa nimaty). For the hazomanga membership of a raza has become a state of being. The hazomanga's body contains within itself the deepest shadow that the raza can cast over people. Yet, even within the hazomanga, the full unfolding of the shadow is only imminent, and it stays so until he holds on to life and until his body, no matter how bent and frail, remains outside the tomb.

women's view: mocking and resisting the shadow

The conversation I recall below occurred during a funeral in Betania while a group of women cooked the communal meal; since it was the funeral of an old grandmother, the women talked loudly, laughing and joking (see below, ch.7).

The discussion was begun by nenin'Polo, a middle aged woman who said that she was impatient to have her menopause, because she wanted to have sex whenever she liked without worrying about getting pregnant. Some other women asked me about the system of 'counting' days after one's period to avoid getting pregnant, and listened

attentively to my explanation and to my suggestion that the system is complicated and not very effective. They quickly decided that knowing one's days of fertility is of very little help, since a woman and her husband or lover can hardly avoid sex when they feel like it. At this point nenin'Pololo sighed, probably at the thought of her possible lovers, and added that the reason she had aged so much was that she had brought up all her children by herself without the help of a man. All the fathers of her children had come too late to ask to do soro, and she had always refused to let them do so. Men are like this, she added, they come when the child is already born and looks nice and healthy. After she had carried the baby inside her body, had nursed and looked after it, the father, who had done nothing to help, like buying blankets or clothes for the baby, would suddenly show up and want the child. Her answer to this had always been no! Men, she said, should ask to do soro when the woman is still pregnant. Then they would get "what they can't see yet" (mbo tsy hita), "what they don't choose" (tsy mifily) and "what they don't know yet" (mbo tsy hay). The men should perform soro when they do not know yet whether the result will be a child, a chicken or a pig (mbo tsy hainy laha zaza, na akoho, na koso). Our laughter at this was so loud that a nearby group chided us mildly that we were at a funeral and that we should try to be more quiet.

Nenin'Polo's view of soro and of her children differs considerably from the one I have taken so far. Although nenin'Polo was joking, her joke is very revealing. We saw above that by doing soron-tsoky (the "soro of the belly") a man takes the risk of acquiring a biby, an animal, instead of a child; from this perspective, nenin'Polo might seem to have been making fun of a man who 'buys' some chicken and pig bones for his tomb and raza. I suggest however that this is not what the women were laughing at; rather, they were mocking the soro that men perform, they were laughing at the raza's shadow.

Although, as we have seen, soro is about children's bones and tombs, about the raza, and about the shadow that the raza casts over people, when nenin'Polo talked about soro she emphasized that her children were good looking, healthy and very much alive. What is remarkable is not that she thought of her children in this way, but that she did so in the context of soro, thereby ignoring the fact that soro is not concerned with living people, with men as fathers or with fathers taking control of their children. Nenin'Polo caused hilarity because she distorted the ritual's accepted meaning; the women around her laughed not at the idea of a man burying pig and chicken bones, but at the idea of him being the father of pigs or chickens. Throughout this chapter I have been arguing that through soro the raza casts a shadow over people and that it anticipates and prepares their death. Through a very simple but fundamental act of inversion, nenin'Polo

undermined what soro is meant to accomplish by establishing her children as living persons, by viewing them as "mouth and flesh" rather than as bones.

Nenin'Polo achieved this inversion by describing how she had carried the children inside her body and how she had raised them, first by nurturing them inside herself and then by breast-feeding them (see above, ch.5 n.6). She objected to performing soro for her children in terms of her hard work as a mother and of the fact that men wished to perform soro for children they had done nothing to raise; the men wanted the children's bones without having contributed anything to their mouths and flesh. More generally, nenin'Polo pointed to a fundamental difference between motherhood and fatherhood among the Vezo.

As shown in the preceding chapter, the link between living people and earlier generations is entirely ungendered: the link of a person with its father is identical to the link with its mother. The ritual of soro, however, introduces a distinction between fatherhood and motherhood. This is because children are buried either in the maternal or in the paternal tomb, but also because of the quite different role that men-fathers and women-mothers play in the act of casting the shadow of the raza over their children.

We saw above that if soro is not performed, the children are buried in their mother's tomb and belong to her raza. This decision by default is explained by the fact that "women are the real 'mistresses' of the

children" (ampela ro tompon'ajà mare), although in actual fact who takes them into his tomb and is thus the children's 'master' is their mother's hazomanga. In order to become 'masters' of the children and to bury them in their own tomb, fathers have to perform soro. In the context of soro, therefore, motherhood and fatherhood are distinguished by the fact that fatherhood is insufficient of itself to win children into raza membership; motherhood, on the other hand, is sufficient by default. Thus, soro establishes fatherhood as something other than procreation; motherhood, by contrast, coincides inescapably with procreation even when it draws children into the maternal raza.

The latter point is clearly illustrated by the way relations between children and their parents are described. Because of the extensive use of classificatory terms, an individual addresses many people as 'mother' and 'father'; however, if one needs to specify that the 'mother' or 'father' is actually the person's parent, the relationship is described as "the mother/father who generated it" (neny/baba niteraky azy),³⁷ and motherhood and fatherhood are both viewed in terms of procreation. However, a man can also be described as "the father who did soro for him/her" (baba nisoro azy), and this is the formula customarily used during funerals, when the raza is told in front of the tomb that a deceased person is going to be buried "with the father who did soro for him/her" (am-babany nisoro azy).³⁸ By contrast, when someone whose

father did not perform soro is buried in their mother's tomb, their link with her tomb and her raza is not described in terms of soro. The woman's hazomanga cannot say that the person is buried "with the mother who did soro for it", because mothers do not perform soro for their children, they only generate them.

Thus, people for whom soro has not been performed are referred to appropriately as "women's children" (anakan'ampela),³⁹ for their only link with the raza and the tomb is through the woman who gave birth to them. When "women's children" die, as we saw, they are not discriminated against in any way; they are buried in their mother's tomb and join her raza. Alive, however, "women's children" are discriminated against in one very significant respect because of their status: they are not allowed to become hazomanga of their mother's raza. To become one, they must first "stand in front of the hazomanga" (mitsanga an-kazomanga) and offer a head of cattle to their maternal raza.⁴⁰

This ritual confirms my interpretation of soro and the hazomanga. Because soro has not been performed for them, "women's children" are shadowless; therefore they cannot be hazomanga, for to be one is to carry within oneself the deepest shadow that the raza can cast over people. In order to become hazomanga, "women's children" must first expose themselves to the raza by performing a kind of soro: standing in front of the raza, they receive the shadow they lack.

We are now in a better position to understand nenin'Polo's joke, and to appreciate that it was no joke after all. Because nenin'Polo's children are "women's children", they are actually shadowless; nenin'Polo is therefore correct in viewing them as good looking, healthy and wholly alive. I suggest, however, that nenin'Polo's view is that of all women towards all their offspring, whether they are "women's children" or not, for women play no part in activating the shadow that will transform living people into bones; women only generate children and do not perform soro for them. Women's view is biased towards life: it focuses on their childrens' mouths and flesh, because that is the only thing they produce.

So far I have discussed how women view the raza's shadow; what remains to be examined is how they are affected by it.

Women are not hazomanga.⁴¹ The reason people give for this is that "women follow the men" (ampela manaraky johary)⁴² at marriage. My friends explained, that if women were hazomanga people would have to follow them when needing to mediate between the living and the raza. Knowing what such movements imply in terms of hierarchy (see above, ch.3), we can easily appreciate why having to do so would be so problematic.

There is, however, another feature of women's mobility that may be more relevant for understanding why women cannot be hazomanga. This feature is connected both to

women's role in procreation and to the ritual of soro. Women's bones are acquired by their fathers through soro; thus, when a woman dies she should be buried with "the father who has performed soro for her" and should enter his raza. This is generally felt to be in accordance with past custom, for "people of the past did not give away their ancestors" (olo taloha tsy nanome lolo). The phrase "women follow their husband if they're alive; if they're dead they are buried with the father who has done soro for them" (ampela manaraky valy laha velo; laha maty milevy am-babany nisoro azy) indicates that fathers are the "masters" of their daughters, if not during their daughters' lifetime certainly after their death.

Despite this, however, among the Vezo⁴³ a woman who has given birth to many children (laha latsaky anaky maro) may be buried with her children. Thus, if soro has been performed by the children's father, the mother may in practice be buried in her husband's tomb, for that is where her children will be buried. However, the formal distinction between being buried 'with the children' rather than 'with the husband' is very important, and is often upheld in ritual practice.

The husband of a woman who died giving birth to her eleventh child approached his father-in-law to "beg for her corpse" (mangataky faty). The woman's father, who was the "master of the corpse" (tompom-paty), had the right to "give or not to give" the body (misy manome, misy tsy manome), and in this instance he refused. Faced with

rejection, the woman's husband sent her children to their grandfather (MF) to beg him to allow their mother to be buried where they would be buried also, namely in their father's tomb. At this point the grandfather agreed, thereby granting not a wife to her husband but a mother to her children.⁴⁴

The emphasis on the fact that a woman enters her husband's tomb as the mother of her children is very significant. We might say that when a mother is buried in her children's tomb (and thus enters her husband's raza) she does so as a "children's woman"; while not in use among the Vezo, this expression can usefully convey the similarity of the woman's position with respect to "women's children". I suggested above that "women's children" (people for whom soro has not been performed) are shadowless, and that when they die they enter the tomb and raza as children of the woman who gave birth to them. "Children's women" (women who follow their children) find their way into their husband's tomb and raza through an identical, specular process, as mothers who gave birth to their children.⁴⁵ Unlike "women's children", however, women are not shadowless, for their fathers' performance of soro established that they should be buried in their fathers' tomb. For "children's women", generation prevails over the shadow cast by their father's act of soro.

If women are unsuitable to be hazomanga because they follow their husbands during life, my analysis suggests that they are even more unsuitable for the role because

they may follow their children at death -- for if they do so, they dispel and render irrelevant their father's act of soro. Thus, women can be seen to resist the raza's shadow twice: a first time, by ignoring it in their children (as "women's children"); a second time, by refusing its final grip over themselves at death (as "children's women"). In both instances, the reason and source of their resistance is the same, the fact that as women they have no control over the unfolding of the shadow.

Chapter 6. Notes

1. By answering that their "kind" (raza) is Vezo, my informants seemed to contradict the statement that "the Vezo are not a kind of people" (Vezo tsy karazan'olo). The reason for the seeming contradiction, however, lies in the different context in which these two statements are made. Since membership of a raza, as we shall see, concerns the dead only, to state that one's raza is Vezo is a way of defining oneself as a living person.

2. Koechlin 1975:123 writes about the Vezo that "tout individu se situe, au point de vue de la parenté, par rapport aux lignages de ses parents; deux du côté paternel, deux du côté maternel; et pour peu que l'on sache réciter ses liens généalogiques, on arrive vite à jongler avec un dizaine de noms de lignages".

3. For similar formulations see e.g. Fauroux 1980:83ff.; Schlemmer 1983:104; Baré 1977:39ff.; Baré 1986:379.

4. In his "récapitulation" of the social organization of the northern Sakalava, Baré (1986:390) makes a similar point: "la discussion sur le caractère 'cognatique' ou non des systèmes sociaux malgaches me paraît à l'heure actuelle dépourvue de sens". However, whereas Southall (1986:417) suggests an alternative model of "cumulative kinship" which stresses that "what seems to be distinctive about all Malagasy kinship systems is not their qualities of cognation and agnation, but their emphasis on kinship and descent status as something achieved gradually and progressively throughout life, and even after death, rather than ascribed and fixed definitively at birth", Baré (1977) addresses people's membership to a descent group from a static perspective, by stressing that clanic affiliation is 'activated' by an 'optative' choice of residence that is nonetheless fixed in space and time. His analysis, however, suggests the 'cumulative' character of descent for women and women's children (1986:374).

5. This approach to the study of kinship is of course nothing new; see Schneider 1968 and 1972; see also n.7 below. With reference to Malagasy kinship, what I suggest to do for the Vezo is similar to Bloch's (1971) approach to Merina kinship and descent.

6. I did not find that the term lolo has a different meaning from the term raza among the Vezo, as suggested by Feeley-Harnik (1978:405) for the Sakalava, for whom lolo is a "third category [in addition to olom-belo, living people, and raza, ancestors] of beings [which] merges human ghosts that have not achieved the status of ancestorhood with the spirits of animal, trees, and sorcerers". See also Lombard (1988:117ff.).

7. This argument recalls Hecht's analysis of the Pukapuka (1977), in which she suggests that it would be more appropriate to talk of "cumulative patrification through burial" rather than of patrilineal descent, and describes pö and wakavae (the patrilineal units) as "patrilineal and burial categories". Membership of a pö or wakavae is "validated by common place of burial with the sociological father". It is a "tentative filiation during a person's lifetime" (1977:184) and is "conditional" and "developmental" (1977:195). What is relevant for a person during its lifetime is the matrilineage, affiliation to which is "congenital" and "unchangeable" (1977:195). Hecht stresses that the distinction between patri- and matrilineages resides in their different functions and areas of relevance: the patrilineage takes care of the 'soul' after death, whereas the matrilineage is concerned with the life of the children. The distinction between the two is ultimately rooted in the belief that women are sexually stronger. The child belongs fully to the "burial lineage", i.e. the patrilineage, only after its death because the man "dies" at climax, whereas the "strength and skill of the living body" belong to the woman (1977:194). Despite the similarities between the Pukapukan and Vezo construals of patrilineal descent, the two systems differ crucially in that the Vezo do not distinguish between life and death by contrasting genders. As discussed in ch.5 above, both Vezo men and women are engaged in producing life, and during their lifetime people are 'affiliated' as living people to both men and women through shared links of 'generation'. The distinction between 'men' and 'women', 'fatherhood' and 'motherhood', which is anticipated through the ritual of soro that I discuss below, only emerges fully within the tomb and raza after death.

8. This statement is at odds with the literature on the Sakalava-Masikoro. For Ottino (1963:43), the raza is "l'unité fondamentale par référence à laquelle l'individu se situe et situe les étrangers", presumably during the individual's lifetime. For Schlemmer (1983) and Fauroux (1980), clans and lineages control access to resources and people.

9. Bloch (1971) also notes that the Merina consider it tactless to enquire about people's karazana, although the cause of unease seems to be rather different from that of the Vezo. Since among the Merina membership of the demes

is indicative of people's rank (according to the deme's closeness to the monarch), asking about a person's karazana has embarrassing hierarchical implications. By contrast with the Vezo, however, an individual's deme membership is a useful piece of sociological information, which can be tactfully obtained by asking for a person's tanindrazana (the land where the ancestors lived). Since "an experienced Merina carries in his head a sociological map of old Imerina", knowing a person's tanindrazana amounts to knowing her karazana and rank (1971:107). Although deme and tomb membership are strongly associated, "burial in a tomb is the ultimate criterion of membership [of the deme/karazana]", and "being buried in a tomb in the area of your group is the final demonstration of membership" (1971:45), the close links between living people and their tanindrazana also indicate that the Merina experience membership of the karazana in ways unknown to the Vezo. The construction of descent among the Merina and the Vezo differs primarily for the way descent is made less (Vezo) or more (Merina) relevant to people as living people.

10. I once sat through a soron-tsoky (the "soro of the belly"; see below) performed at my adoptive family's place. However, since the event was totally unexpected and took me (and the people to whom the ritual offering was being made) by surprise, I was able to understand very little of what went on. The fact that the ritual had not been previously arranged with my family's elders was "against custom" (tsy fomba) and was regarded by some as "improper" (tsy mety) and as a case of "wrongdoing" (hadisoa). The subsequent discussions about the ritual's 'rightness' merely increased my confusion.

11. The type of ritual referred to in conversation is quite clear from the context, and people normally refer to soron'anake as soro; I follow the same practice in my account.

12. I use iano, which means 'so and so' and is ungendered, as a proper name for the sake of convenience.

13. If Iano's father is still alive, Iano is buried in the tomb where his father is expected to be buried. In turn, Iano's father's place of burial is determined by whether Iano's grandfather had performed soro or not for his son.

14. I intentionally use the term 'elders' very vaguely here; for more details, see the section below on the hazomanga.

15. See above, n.13.

16. References in this chapter to the paternal/maternal or father/mother's raza are to the raza the mother or father

are expected to become members of through burial; I am not implying that either father or mother belong to a raza.

17. Soro might still be performed even after Iano's father's death by Iano itself (misoro vata = "to do soro for oneself").

18. "Manomboky eto, manan'anaky ny lehilahy. Laha tsy mahavita soro, tsy manan'anaky ny lehilahy fa ampela ro tompon'ajà, ampela, neniny niteraky azy: ie ro tompon'ajà. Laha mahavita soro, baban'ajà ro tompon'ajà. [pause] Hoatsy: maty ny zaza; laha mbo tsy mahavita soro babany, milevy amin'ny lolon'neniny. Maty zaza, maty ajà, vita soron'babany, milevy amin'ny lolon'babany" [Polo, Betania]. I have rendered the term tompo rather awkwardly with "master" and "mistress" because the term has a wide range of meanings, from simple ownership of an object (tompon-kiraro reto, "the owner of these shoes") to a relation of authority over things and people (tompon-trano, "the master of the house", "the head of the family"; tompon'aja, "the master of the children", the person who has control and responsibility over them; tompon-tany, "the masters of the land" or autochthons). In many parts of Madagascar tompoko ("my master") is a term of address equivalent to sir and madam.

19. Although a father need perform soro only for the first-born child in order to establish burial rights over all children the mother will bear him subsequently, he does not acquire permanent rights over the woman's fertility, as is instead common in bridewealth systems. Also, if the marriage breaks up, soro loses all effect, for the man who has done soro is not the 'master' of children had from other men. The fathers of these other children have to perform soro in turn; if they do not, the offspring are buried in their mother's tomb. In other words, a father's paternity is neither established nor guaranteed by soro, confirming that soro is not to do with control over procreation but with control over dead bodies. A very different interpretation of soro among the Masikoro is in Lavondès (1967:63-67); for Schlemmer (1983:101) the ritual concerns "la production d'hommes - comme force de travail: d'hommes en âge de travailler".

20. See also Koechlin (1975:133).

21. More seldom, depending on the customs (fomba) of the woman's raza, the man can be asked to bring bananas or beans.

22. The man can approach his in-laws to ask for their consent only if he has already "come out in front of his in-laws" and has performed the marriage ritual (soritse) described in ch.5 above.

23. Lavondès (1967:64) reports that for the Masikoro soron-tsoky is a ritual "destiné à 'enlever' les conséquences des fautes connues ou inconnues commises par les membres du groupe familial de la femme [soro ala havo"]". It is performed by offering a head of cattle provided by the man's family, which is killed at the woman's elders; if the family is poor the ritual can be performed with rice. There is no suggestion that soron-tsoky acts as a substitute for the soro performed after the child is born; see also Schlemmer 1983:100-1. While Koechlin (1975:134) does not discuss the issue explicitly, he would seem to suggest that the Vezo he worked with in Beavato consider soron-tsoky a substitute for soron'aomby.

24. Biby has a wider range of meanings than the term 'animal', designating what is not human, including animals, people who behave inhumanly, ancestors (see ch.6 below), and various creatures of the sea and forest. For this reason, I have preferred to leave the term untranslated.

25. Although there is some disagreement as to the exact age when a child should be buried in tombs, the general principle I have stated is upheld unanimously.

26. Another informant told me that although "water babies" have bones, these are still very soft and weak (taola fa misy avao, fa malemy, tsy henja).

27. Since the performance or lack of soro determines where people are buried, there should logically be no doubt about where a person is buried at her death: either in her father's or her mother's tomb. There is nonetheless scope for a number of ambiguities which can lead both to negotiations and fights. Firstly, we have seen that a father may still 'beg' for his child's body even if he has not performed soro, and while legitimate, a denial by his in-laws can cause great tension and resentment. Second, the rights conferred by soro can be contested on the basis of the life history of the parties concerned. Let us take the case of a man whose father had performed soro for him many years before, but had followed his mother when his parents divorced and had lived with her and her kin ever since. When the man fell ill and the seriousness of his illness became clear, the elders of his paternal group were informed; contrary to custom, however, they did not visit the dying man. This fact was later adduced by the dead man's mother to justify her refusal to relinquish the body to her son's paternal group. After lengthy negotiations, it was agreed that the mother could keep the body during the funeral but that it would be buried in the paternal group's tomb "with the father who did soro for him" (amin'ny baba nisoro azy). See Beaujard 1983:446ff. for an example of actual fights and stealing of corpses among the Tanala of south-eastern Madagascar.

28. Note that the raza whose shadow is projected onto a living person is that of the raza which the person will join at her death, not that of the raza with respect to which soro is performed.

29. In what follows I use the term hazomanga to indicate the person who holds the hazomanga proper (wooden poles where offerings are presented to the ancestors), despite the fact that the literature refers to this person as mpitan-kazomanga ("the holder of the hazomanga"). As I explain below, in the area where I did fieldwork people make no distinction between the two.

30. Koechlin (1975:129) also comes close to explaining the position of the hazomanga in terms of his association with the raza as a group of dead people buried in one tomb, rather than in terms of his function as the head of the raza defined as a group of living people.

31. When the hazomanga calls the ancestors, he cannot (fa faly) call his juniors ("junior siblings", zay, or "children", anaky) by name; they can only be called collectively together with the other ancestors (ankapobe). If an offering must be made to one of them individually, the hazomanga has a junior person perform the actual offering.

32. See Julien (1925-29), Lavondès (1967), Koechlin (1975). Schlemmer (1983:100 n.25) writes that the term hazomanga designates three things at once: "la fonction de chef de lignage", "son détenteur", and "l'objet de référence rituelle de cette fonction".

33. The origin of the hazomanga has been generally associated for the whole of western Madagascar with the conquering dynasties, as an institution imposed by the latter on the autochthonous populations. See Kent 1970:314 for the Mahafaly; Lavondès 1967:21 n.3 for the Masikoro-Sakalava.

34. I discuss the fact that women are not hazomanga below.

35. "Hazomanga maranitse reñy, aminy Vezo, misy avao kiraikiraiky, fa zay no mahasarotsy azy raha zay, fa tsy dea izy loatsy no tompony, fa raha mandimby olo lavitsy aña ka zay ro tsy anañane añoreñane any raha eo. Fa laha teña tompony, manahaka ao Masikoro mbao reo, reo fa tompony reo, razany eo avao laha teo, tsy nandeha baka lavitsy aña, ehe, ka fa maty raiky fa mandimby azy eo ie, maty raiky fa mandimby azy eo ie, zay. Fa Vezo, olo baka lavitsy ka ny razam-beny, tompon' hazomanga io, tsy raha eo fa tavela aña, aña, aña. Fa ñanaky avao, zafy avao, mandeha mañatoy, mañatoy io ka io tsy mahazo manory any hazo maranitsy io atoy io, fa tena tompony mbo aña, mbo lavitsy aña" [Jean-Didier, Betania].

36. Koechlin 1975:126 describes the hazomanga-object in Bevato; Millot and Pascal 1952:27 publish a picture of an hazomanga in the area of Morombe.

37. The terms nenikely, babakely ("little mother", "little father", a junior female/male sibling of ego's parents) and nenibe, bababe ("big mother", "big father", a senior female/male sibling of ego's parents) are seldom used to discriminate between a parent and its siblings.

38. Describing the process of depersonalization that takes place during funerals in Mayotte, Lambek and Breslar (1986:407) report that the dead person is addressed as the offspring of his/her mother, instead of the father, as is the case during lifetime. They suggest that whereas the attribution of paternity is a social convention (which is asserted), maternity is a self-evident, 'natural' fact; hence, the use of the matronymic form eclipses the dead person's social identity. Among the Vezo, by contrast, the dead person is not referred to as the offspring either of the father or of the mother. By referring to the dead person in terms of the person who performed soro for it, what is stated and is effectively activated for the first time is the dead person's identity as a member of the raza.

39. As mentioned in chapter 5 above, "outside children" (anaky amonto) are children who have no father; consequently, no soro will be performed for them. Although the terms anaky amonto and anakan'ampela refer to the same people, they imply different things: "women's children" are such vis-à-vis the raza, whereas "outside children" are such vis-à-vis the living (i.e. they have no father and no paternal kin).

40. See Koechlin 1975:129. Note that this ritual differs from the soro that a person can perform for herself as a substitute of that which her father had never performed; see above, n.17.

41. Koechlin (1975:129) mentions that in the absence of a man, a woman can become hazomanga, but I found no evidence that this is the case.

42. This was the only context in which the same, but inverted formulation used to describe uxorilocal marriages (see above, ch.3) was used for virilocal marriages.

43. When discussing this issue, my informants stated explicitly that this was how things are done by "the people who live on the coast" (zahay olo an-driaky). Not surprisingly, the issue of burial is not properly discussed in the literature because it is not viewed (as I view it here) as the act that constitutes the raza and activates raza membership. An exception seems to be Schlemmer (1983:100 n.26), who mentions burial when

discussing what he describes as women's "statut ambivalent".

44. The fact that a woman enters her husband's tomb as mother-of-her-children and not as wife-of-her-husband is confirmed by the fact that a barren woman cannot be buried in her husband's tomb. Doing so is taboo (faly) and is therefore not open to negotiation.

45. In order to be buried with their offspring, men and women must have done very different things: whereas a man must have performed soro, all that is required of a woman is to have given birth.

CHAPTER 7

SEPARATING LIFE FROM DEATH

When people are alive, the raza is a shadow that lingers over them; when they die, they become the raza. The living imagine the raza as the experience of being dead and the ancestors as lifeless beings who have joined the raza. This image is construed through ritual activity which I analyze in the following two chapters. In this chapter I analyze funerals; in chapter 8 I shall examine what the living regard as their work for the dead, namely the construction of the tombs that create and contain the raza. Since the main theme that these rituals elaborate is that of the separation between the living and the dead, I shall begin by looking at the clearest manifestation of this separation, the contrast drawn by the living between two different kinds of space: cemetery and village.

hot cemeteries and cold villages

Cemeteries lie in the forest (añala any), far away from the villages (lavitsy mare) and well hidden in the vegetation (tsy hita maso). People say that cemeteries are hidden like this because the Vezo dislike seeing the tombs, which make them sad and unhappy (mampalahelo); people would also be afraid (mahatahotsy) if the tombs lay too near or inside the village, as is known to be the custom among the Merina. In any case, as was pointed out, cemeteries are not places that one visits very often; one hardly goes there just for a stroll (mitsangatsanga). The living only visit the cemeteries when they carry a corpse (laha manday faty) or build a tomb (lafa miasa lolo).

In Belo, the cemetery lies a long distance away in a deserted area of shrubby forest across the lagoon. When I first took part in a funeral there, I was warned that the cemetery lay at a great distance and that the long walk under the scorching sun would be very tiring; as I soon found out, the march was indeed very exhausting. If it were not for what I had learnt in Betania, however, I might have overlooked the fact that the cemetery in Belo stood where it did not merely as a matter of fact but in respect of a norm. At the same time, my experience in Betania suggested that the cemeteries' distant location can sometimes be more a norm than a statement of fact.

The area around Betania has two cemeteries, one to the south of the village (an-dolo raiky) and one to the east (an-dolo be). The southern cemetery is strikingly close to

the village itself, the reason being that in the early seventies Betania was "broken" in half (kopaky tana) by the incoming ocean, and the inhabitants of the northern half had to move to the south of the village. Since then Betania has been forced to expand to the south in the direction of the cemetery; as a result, the house at the southernmost tip of the village is now nearly bordering on the northern end of the cemetery.

A major worry in Betania is the process of marine erosion,¹ whose effects are easily observed. The villagers fear that the strip of land on which Betania lies, with the ocean to the west and the swamps to the east, will eventually be entirely eroded. As the sea pushes southwards and eastwards, however, people's main concern seems to be the village's growing proximity to its cemeteries. On one occasion, observing my dismay at seeing the water at high tide coming so close to the inhabited area, an old woman explained that there had been dramatic changes in the recent past. She claimed that what is nowadays the closest fishing location, Berenzee, which lies c.5km offshore, was not very long before a Vezo village, whereas Betania itself had been an area of rice-fields inhabited by Masikoro. For the people who lived in Berenzee, the cemetery (which lay where it still lies now) was "really far" (lavitsy tokoa), so far in fact that when they went to bury someone, they had to sleep outdoors for a night because they couldn't get back home on the same day. The woman asked me what I thought would happen if

the sea keeps pushing inland: will people end up living among the tombs?

Although I did not know the answer to my friend's question, I soon discovered that each funeral I witnessed in Betania provided the opportunity to deny the actual proximity of the village and its cemeteries. The distance between the two was recreated by asserting the experience of a long and exhausting journey, even if in fact the distance was covered in a short and effortless walk. After every burial, as I headed back towards my house, there would always be someone in the crowd who suggested that I felt, as everyone else did, exhausted by the walk. Although distance and tiredness are, of course, a matter of personal judgement, I came to realize that what was at stake was rather a shared appreciation that the distance between village and cemetery must be, both in Belo and Betania, experienced as long and exhausting.

Cemeteries and villages are distant because they differ irreducibly from one another. Cemeteries are "hot" (mafana), villages are "cold" (manintsy). Heat and cold are the attributes of the earth (tany) where the dead and the living respectively reside; the two attributes, however, express the categorical difference between cemeteries and villages rather than denoting a quality inherent to either location.

I came across the notion that the village earth is cold while discussing the meaning of a formula, sañatsia tany

manintsy, that people often seem to mumble almost to themselves. Sañatsia can be translated as "forgive me", tany means "earth" or "land", and manintsy means "cold". The expression therefore means to beg the cold earth (the land where the earth is cold) for forgiveness. I first became aware of this formula when a man uttered it before sketching his family's tomb on the sand to tell me about a plan to build an extension to it. In answer to my query, the man later explained that he had asked the cold earth of the village to forgive him for using it as if it were the hot earth of the cemetery.²

I tried to argue with my Vezo friends that the association between heat and cemeteries is counter-intuitive. I used Bloch's ethnography (1986) to describe the coldness of Merina tombs, suggested that ancestors and all that is associated with them ought to be cold, and stated my surprise that the Vezo should think otherwise.³ Most of my interlocutors were unmoved by my reaction; some were positively annoyed by my insistence; a few however explained that cemeteries are hot because "in cemeteries there is no breath" (an-dolo tsy misy ay).

Breathing refers to life.⁴ A baby in the mother's womb that moves, eats and is alive (fa velo) must "already have its breath" (ainy fa misy); the moment when someone dies is described as "his/her breath has departed" (fa roso ny ainy). Cemeteries are breathless, therefore, because they are lifeless. But why should the lack of life make cemeteries hot? After pestering my friends for days, one

finally volunteered that the expression is a "manner of speech" (fomba firesake). Living people desire coolness and try to achieve it (nintsy ro ilain'olom-belo), because coolness stands for calm, lack of worries and an unproblematic life (laha tsy misy problème, laha tsy misy heritseritsy hafa, de manintsinintsy soa teña). To say that cemeteries are hot is not meant to be a description, but a way of stressing their difference (sambihafa mare) with villages. According to my friend, the heat of the dead is merely a figure of speech that is contrasted with the (desired) coolness of the living.⁵

The distance between villages and cemeteries is meant to separate what aims and wishes to remain cold from what is hot. Informants were categorical in stating that "the dead and the living are not together, they are not the same" (ny maty ny velo tsy miaraky, tsy mitovy), and in arguing that there has to be a barrier (hefitsy) separating them (miavaky). The most extreme formulation of this concept was a statement that "the ancestors aren't people, they're 'animals', they aren't relatives of the living" (lolo reo tsy olo fa biby, tsy longon' olom-belo). The dead are related to the living insofar as the living have been generated by them (see above ch.5); nonetheless, when the living wish both to assert their liveliness and to preserve their coolness, they are led to define the dead as something categorically other.

The image that the living construe of the dead is strikingly vague. Vezo have no elaborate theory of the afterlife, and people show little interest in speculating about the activities of the dead. I was told for example that some pots I had noticed inside a few tombs in Betania were for the dead to cook their food in, so that they would not return and ask to be fed by the living. At the same time, people explained that since nowadays "there are people who do not know fear" (misy olo tsy mahay tahotsy) and dare steal inside the tombs, one tends not to leave anything there or to make holes in the pots so as to make them useless for the thieves. When I asked how the dead manage to cook with leaky pots or with none, I was greeted with a puzzled look and the answer that they did not know, and had little interest in knowing. When I pressed my question, however, some people suggested that the dead have canoes, while one woman thought that they must have markets to get supplies from. It thus seems that if pressed, the living will imagine the dead as a sort of mirror image of themselves, and the dead's existence as a sort of life-after-death that includes food, canoes and markets. For this reason the Vezo's lack of interest, or even discomfort, in reflecting about the afterlife, and therefore the vagueness with which they construe the breathless existence in the cemeteries, seem essential to imagining and maintaining a clear separation and contrast between the living and the dead. One image, however,

stands out from within this deliberate vagueness -- that of the dead's sharp longing for life.

the funerals

One evening, around the time I was enquiring about the contrast between heat and cold, dadilahy volunteered the statement that when people sit outside their homes and chat while waiting for their meal, and eat, and chat a little longer before going to sleep, everything is "nicely cool" (manintsinintsy soa). When there is a death in the village (laha misy faty), however, everyone is hot (mafana).

The occurrence of a death breaks down the separation between life (in the village) and death (in the cemetery). Funerals are the process through which the barrier is recreated. First, death is allowed to disrupt people's life, as productive activities are halted, and cooking, eating and sleeping are moved in proximity with the corpse. Then, death is expelled from the village and taken to the cemetery. When the body has been laid in the tomb and is covered with sand, an elder gives a short speech to thank the funeral's participants, following this by declaring: "The funeral is over" (fa vita). The crowd disperses and everyone returns home. On leaving the cemetery to re-enter the village, people experience the barrier that the funeral has created anew. What follows aims to re-evoked this experience.

For ease of exposition, I shall begin by describing funerals as if they followed an unchanging routine, despite the fact that they vary significantly according to the status of the deceased and the emotional involvement of the living. I begin by what my Vezo friends taught me to recognize as a 'normal' funeral: an occasion of sadness caused by an unexpected and untimely death. I turn then to the funeral of the very old, for whom death is less unexpected and untimely because the deceased has "lasted a long time" (naharitsy). In this kind of funeral, the living are expected to rejoice as they celebrate the dead person.

duty and disruption: the wake and the communal meals

A death in the village is first revealed by cries that suddenly erupt from within a house. Anyone close enough to hear runs in their direction. The door of the house where the corpse is lying stays shut, while a few people of the same gender as the deceased wash the body, tie its feet, arms and jaw, comb or plait its hair and dress it. When the door is opened, the people who sit closest to the entrance go inside the house, cry and sit there for a while; they then move out and sit in silence nearby. The crowd then slowly disperses; only the relatives of the deceased stay inside and around the house. Among these relatives is the deceased's hazomanga, the "master of the corpse" (tompom-paty), who will preside over the funeral

and in particular over delivering the body to the tomb and raza.

Later on a formal announcement (fañambara) of the death is made to every village household. Two boys go from house to house and mutter in a low voice that they have come to announce so and so's death. On this occasion the dead person's first name is used, even if the person was addressed with a tekno-name during her lifetime; I was told that this is so because that is the name that will be written on the dead person's cross (see below and ch.8). Messengers are also sent to inform relatives who live close enough to come in time before the burial; those who are too distant will get a brief letter with the basic information: who died, when, and the date of burial.

As long as the dead body stays at the village, people will gather at night around the house where it lies and sing until dawn (miaritory); each day, a crowd gathers to eat the two communal meals (sakafo am-paty) provided by the dead person's family. Both activities are described as a process of moving from every house in the village to "approach the deceased" (mamonjy faty).

Miaritory means "to endure the absence of sleep". Soon after dark men, women and children gather around the dead person's home. Two Petromax lamps owned by the village community illuminate the area around the house. People slowly emerge from the darkness in small groups and sit down in a place of their choosing. Women are usually surrounded by children, who will soon lie down on the sand

and fall asleep wrapped up in their blankets. Although adults will also try to get some sleep during the night, everyone will complain the next day that the mosquitoes or the humidity made it impossible to have a proper rest. Some will attend the wake only until the early hours of the morning and then go home for some sleep; others go to sleep early in the evening and join the wake from the first hours of the morning until dawn. Younger people will be very active throughout the night, although not necessarily in anything directly concerning the wake; groups of young men play dominoes in a corner or move in small groups in search of new sexual encounters. The area of darkness around the wake is filled with ceaseless comings and goings.

The purpose of the wake is to produce "ripe singing" (hira masake) of church hymns that everyone knows by heart.⁶ The singing lasts from early night until daybreak (vaky andro). For the first couple of hours people sing together with little order, everyone performing at the top of their voices. Slowly, as people tire or get bored, the singers divide into two groups, often of no more than four or five people each, and take turns to sing. There is a core number of people who sustain the singing through the night at every funeral, people who are known to be good singers (mahay mihira rozy). There is a tacit understanding that people who sing, particularly those who "sing hard" (mihira mare), must be rewarded with rum; if the dead person's relatives provide no rum, the singing

will not be "ripe". But although such stinginess is criticized, so are singers who "play politics" (manao politiky) by holding back their "hard singing" so as to get more rum. Due to the rum, the night-singers are usually so drunk by daybreak that they go on howling by force of inertia until their voices wear out entirely.

Attendance of the wake implies different things for different people according to what they are engaged in during the night. Ideally, everyone should contribute loudly to the common singing; yet the fact that most people do not do so is not considered especially significant. The main expectation and what people will be thanked for is that they be present at the wake rather than being asleep in their houses. At dawn, when the crowd disperses, everyone feels completely exhausted; it is through such tiredness, as we shall see, that people participate in the heat caused by death.

During the communal meals men and women are assigned to different tasks. Women are in charge of cooking; men are responsible for building the coffin (tamango) and the cross (lakroa) which will bear the dead person's name. But whereas only a small number of men are needed for this second task, which is usually completed in an afternoon, preparing the meal involves a far larger contingent of women to fetch wood and water, cook, distribute the food and clean up, and their cooperation is needed for as many days as the funeral lasts. And since even if they do not

participate actively in any of the work, the villagers are expected to participate in the day's gathering, all other village activities come grinding to a halt.

The focus of the daily gathering is the eating of the meal called "meal at the deceased" (sakafo am-paty) or "food at the deceased" (hany am-paty). Both the providers and the consumers state emphatically that the food tastes bad (tsy soa). One woman suggested that this was because the meat is boiled in water with no onions and tomatoes (ketsiky am-paty tsy soa... tsy misy tongolo, tsy misy tamatese). Another explanation that seems to be implicit in people's insistence that it is food eaten at, or close to the dead person, is that the food tastes bad because it is cooked and eaten in proximity with death. The lack of onions and tomatoes signals that this food is something different from, and cannot taste like everyday food.⁷

Although I was told that the dead person's family distributes food to the crowd because people have to interrupt their normal activities and therefore cannot provide for their daily meals, the participants also stress that what they eat at the funeral should not be a substitute of their normal meal. Thus, when the crowd disperses after eating the "food at the deceased", everyone will deliberately eat another meal cooked by someone left at home for this purpose. As people say, the food at the funeral is not meant to make one full (tsy mahavintsy), for to do so would be far too expensive for the dead person's family. Therefore, participants in the

meal take care not to seem to be stuffing themselves; it is also improper (tsy mety) to leave the gathering as soon as one has finished eating, for this would show that one has "approached the deceased" only with the intention to be fed.

At this point, one might suggest that if people are worried about seeming greedy the food cannot be as bad as they say. In fact, the women do not aim to cook poorly. Although they will readily discuss the food's shortcomings (the rice may have been cooked in too little water, or the meat may be too salty, or there was not enough broth to go with the rice), the women make an effort to cook well, and the failure to do so is strongly criticized. Similarly, the dead person's family is expected to provide enough ingredients for a decent or even enjoyable meal.

Eating at funerals, however, must not be enjoyable, for else it would mean that the living are enjoying death and conviviality with the deceased.

Therefore the more a meal is to people's taste, the more important it is to emphasize that the "food at the deceased" is bad by avoiding eating much and with greed. One eats in order to demonstrate one's closeness to the dead person and to participate in the disruption caused by death.

People gave a very simple answer to the question why they attend funerals: if they didn't, they couldn't expect other people to attend their own and those of their kin.⁸

By contrast, when I tried to understand the "meaning" (ino dikany?) of the actions performed while the dead person is still in the village, I got no response. After witnessing five or six funerals, I began to understand that when a death occurs, it is as if the whole village put itself into motion through a routine that is acted out and experienced as such, and that might have little 'meaning' once it is taken up. At the same time, I realized that to participate in the routine is a matter of choice. As soon as a death was formally announced, people became engrossed in the discussion whether or not to "approach the deceased", pitting their reluctance to do so against their sense of duty and reciprocity.⁹

At every funeral in Betania, my adoptive mother would engage the entire family in the same discussion as to whether she should attend the wake or not, given that her health was very poor and that she could not afford to catch a flu. Although she nearly always decided to attend, on the grounds that if she did not she would feel ashamed (mahamenatse) and no-one would come to her funeral, she would unfailingly complain about the dampness of the sand and at times would cough for a few days after the event. Since I refused to take up the excuses she provided me with for not attending the communal meal, she expected me to complain of a stomach-ache for having had to eat what she firmly stated was uncooked rice. I eventually realized that the family discussions, the mother's cough and my own

stomach-ache were all essential parts of the funerary routine.

As dadilahy explained, when death is present in the village everyone is hot. Death, however, does not produce heat of itself: people must deliberately give up their coolness by abandoning their ordinary lives and food to "approach the deceased". The wake and the communal meals cause a loss of coolness through lack of sleep, tiredness, drunkenness and eating 'bad' food. As my adoptive mother repeatedly demonstrated, this disruption -- the transition from coolness to heat -- is enhanced and accentuated by people's open discussion of the possibility that they might not participate in the funerary ritual, thereby transforming a routine into a choice of duty.¹⁰

"when one's dead, one's dead"

I mentioned in chapter 3 above that the Vezo have "easy customs" because they are soft and gentle people. A "difficult custom" (fomba sarosty) the Vezo could not endure is to have funerals that last a long time, like those of the Masikoro or the Antandroy. Death, and the disruption that it causes in the village, are not allowed to remain there for long.

Some of my friends admitted that funerals lasting weeks or even months would simply be unaffordable by the Vezo, who do not own cattle and therefore couldn't feed the village for such a long time. Expense, however, is not the main reason for keeping funerals short. The main reason is

that the Vezo abhor keeping dead bodies in the village for more than a few days because the sight of a decomposing body "makes people sad" (mampalahelo). Accordingly, they employ various devices to keep the corpse cool and delay putrefaction. Little openings are made in the walls of the house so as to create a gentle breeze over the body; the leaves of a tree (ravin-kinana) are said to keep the body cool; formalin, when it can be afforded, is considered a "very good thing" (raha soa mare). When the body begins to decompose, measures are taken to avoid contact with it. If the body "breaks" (yaky manta), it is immediately put inside the coffin so as to avoid handling it as putrefaction advances; nylon sacks are carefully placed under and around the body to prevent fluids from dripping out of the coffin. If the smell becomes too powerful or the dead person's features begin to alter, the coffin is closed and the lid is nailed down.

Rightly or not, the Vezo consider these acts to be peculiar to themselves. They inject formalin or put plastic bags inside the coffin under the awareness that other people have different, "difficult" customs which force them to endure the sight of and the contact with putrefaction. The Vezo refer constantly to these alternative forms of behaviour. When a coffin is nailed down because the sight of the swelling corpse can no longer be endured, people comment on the Vezo's "easiness" compared to the "hardness" of the Masikoro, who allegedly have the strength of character to observe the decomposing

body of their beloved. One way the Vezo seem to rationalize their "easiness" and contrast themselves to other Malagasy groups is by repeating the vaguely Keynesian saying, "when one's dead, one's dead" (lafa maty, maty). This motto refers to two related issues, the first one concerning the corpse and the second one the separation of the living and the dead.

When a body is lifeless (i.e. "breathless") it no longer has any bodily sensations: "it doesn't feel or hear anything" (tsy mahare raha). Once, when formalin had been used to preserve the body of a very old woman, someone gave a detailed description of how hard it had been for the doctor, who had arrived with great delay, to inject the liquid in the corpse; others remarked that it made no difference because the old woman was dead and no longer felt anything. Similar comments were made when a gold tooth was extracted with great difficulty from the corpse of a young woman.

The belief that a corpse lacks all sensitivity and is doomed to putrefaction is used to justify the statement that it makes no sense (tsy misy dikany) to keep dead bodies in the village where they no longer belong. To some extent, people's insistence during funerals that there is no point in keeping the corpse in the village for long, suggests that some may feel the temptation, if not the desire, to do so. The removal of the corpse from the village is known to be emotionally traumatic for those closest to the deceased. These people are most affected by

the sight of decomposition, and at the same time the most inclined to hold on to the deceased so as to postpone its departure. Thus, the role of "wise people" (olo mahihitsy), particularly of the village elders (olo be), is to remind everyone that "when one's dead, one's dead", that "s/he won't come back to life but will begin to stink", and that "when one's dead one must be buried" (lafa maty maty ... tsy mihavelo fa mansty ... tsy maintsy mandevy lafa maty).

the burial

There is only one appropriate place for a dead body, and that is the cemetery. The decision about when to bury it is taken by the dead person's family and is announced during the wake, usually when people gather the first night. Children's funerals generally include only one night's wake; adults' funerals, especially those of old people, may last three or four nights.

Some days, or half days, must be avoided by delaying or anticipating the burial. Burial effectively starts with the removal of the body from the house. If it has yet to be done, the corpse is first laid in a coffin, the lid is nailed down and covered with a white cloth, and the coffin is carried out of the house heading eastwards (through a door or a window) in the direction of the raza.

The separation at this point between the dead person and what it leaves behind as it moves out of the house and village is differently marked according to the dead

person's status. A child's separation is cried out by its mother who, from inside the house, sees the coffin go; she is not allowed to join the procession because people say that she would cry too much at the cemetery and would be unable to face the burial. If the dead person was married, the spouse must stand outside the house on one side of the coffin opposite to a close kin of the deceased (normally a sibling, and always a person of the same gender as the deceased). The two hold a string called fañitoa, loosely knotted in the middle, over the coffin and pull it until it breaks, at which point the coffin begins to move towards the cemetery. In the case of an old widow, whose funeral I describe further below, the separation was acted out by her grandchildren (zafy) who were called into the house just before the coffin-lid was nailed down. They walked past their grandmother and were told to look at her: "there's your grandmother, she's dead!" (io dadinao, fa maty io). Outside the doorway, the coffin was laid down and the grandchildren stepped across it; the procession then moved towards the cemetery.

Once the body has left the house and the act of separation has been accomplished, it cannot re-enter it. Hence, if the funeral takes place in one village, let us say in Betania, and the body is buried elsewhere, for example in Belo, the deceased cannot be put inside a house when it arrives in Belo; if it is not buried immediately, it will be kept outdoors. The reason for this prohibition is that when the coffin is removed from the house and

heads eastwards towards the raza, it cannot change direction, its destination must be the tomb.

The act of separation when the coffin leaves the house marks death's departure; the body's destination is irreversible. But although delivering the corpse to its tomb solves the problem of harbouring death within the village, as the body arrives at the cemetery the focus of attention shifts to the dead person's entry into its raza.

Leading the procession to the tomb is the dead person's hazomanga, who will be the first to get there together with a few other men. On arriving at the tomb of which he is "master", the hazomanga sprinkles some rum over it and announces (mañambara) to the raza that so and so is coming and is about to enter their "house" (see below, ch.8). Having just been informed about the new burial, the ancestors are exhorted not to be surprised (tsy hotseriky nareo), are told that they should have no reason to enquire in the future about the body they are about to receive, and are asked not to do so (ka hañontanianareo). Finally, the ancestors are exhorted to behave well (mipetsara soa nareo).

The ancestors must be kept informed, I was told, because otherwise they will visit the living to enquire about the alien body buried in their tomb. The problem with this is that if the dead have to ask questions of the living, the latter fall seriously ill and may even die. By informing the ancestors of the new arrival, however, the hazomanga also opens the way into the tomb and raza for

the dead person. As I remarked in chapter 6 above, this announcement by the "master of the corpse" makes a second soro at the paternal hazomanga unnecessary and redundant. The 'acquisition' of a new member by the paternal raza established by the first soro but that had remained suspended thereafter, finally comes into effect when the hazomanga stands in front of the tomb and the men who accompany him begin digging the grave.

The procession itself, as it slowly moves from the village towards the cemetery, is led by a young man carrying the cross, and is followed by the coffin carried by four men, who take turns with others who stay close by. The crowd follows, men and women together, who resume the singing that had ended at daybreak; children are left at home, for they are forbidden from visiting the tombs during a funeral. Normally, by the time the procession reaches the tomb the grave has been dug. The coffin is lowered into the grave, with the head to the east and lying even and flat; the wood cross is placed at the head. The crowd gathers all around to watch. When the coffin is in place, the women are asked to throw a handful of sand from inside the tomb over the grave, and then move off slowly before coming together again at a small distance in the shade. After the women have thrown the sand, the men who are standing inside the tomb begin to shovel sand over the coffin. The noise of wet sand hitting the coffin alternates with the howls of the dead person's kin and

friends, who are moved to a distance and urged to stop because crying at cemeteries is forbidden (fa faly).

As the sand inside the tomb is swept even and clean, a man "who knows how to speak in public" (mahay mivola am-bahoake) asks for people's attention and delivers a brief speech on behalf of the dead person's family. He thanks the people who have attended wakes and communal meals and who have carried the dead person to the cemetery. He recalls when the death occurred and the succession of days people have "approached the deceased". Finally, he says, the deceased has arrived where s/he belongs (farany, fa avy an-plasy misy azy, lit. "s/he has arrived in the place where s/he is"). Raza membership for the dead person starts at this moment, as s/he arrives in this place.

Once the dead body is interred where it belongs, the living have completed the removal of death from the village. Something quite remarkable, however, has occurred as they did so: in order to put an end to the death's intrusion in the village, the living have intruded into death. When the hazomanga exhorts the ancestors to behave well, he is concerned that this intrusion do no harm to the living. Above all, however, as soon as the burial is over people must move out of the cemetery, in order to recreate a similar but inverse separation to that when the deceased was removed from the village. Hence the speech of thanksgiving ends with an exhortation to the crowd to disperse and return quietly home. The final words are uttered as a command: "it is over; let us return home" (fa

vita, tsika holy). Women are the first to stand up and repeat: "it is over, let us return home".

I suggested above that when people return from the cemetery to the village they experience the separation that their involvement in the funeral has created. When the villagers are ordered to go home and are told that everything is over, the process of disruption they had previously joined in -- actively, even purposefully and out of a sense of duty -- acquires its full meaning. As they walk back to the village, they return to normal food, normal nights of sleep, normal productive activities; in other words, they walk back to coolness.¹¹ Coolness, however, is meaningful only insofar as people know what heat feels like; the village feels cold only because the cemetery was hot, and vice versa. The living enjoy and desire coolness; they would gladly do without heat. When death occurs, however, the entire village joins in the heat (for as long as people with 'easy' customs can endure) in order to experience what coolness feels like when death is finally expelled.

What I have just described has the appearance of a simple logical exercise. When people participate in funerals, stay awake and sing through the night, eat food that may be good but must taste bad, smell the sickly smell of decomposition, hear cries and wails of despair, enter the cemetery, see a grave and throw handfuls of sand over a coffin, the logical exercise is experienced rather than being apprehended. Through this experience, the

coolness of the village, the heat of the cemetery and the restored barrier between the two become real and meaningful.

Dadikoroko's death

Funerals are not performed for everyone in the same manner. As I mentioned in chapter 5 above, the death of a small baby (zazamena, zazarano) does not lead to a funeral because the baby is not a proper person yet (mbo tsy olo). Since the baby has no bones, burial in the cemetery (which is where bones are kept) makes no sense, and the body is buried in an unmarked grave in the forest. By contrast, children old enough to sit up straight are persons (fa olo) and have bones, and consequently are buried in the cemetery. Their funeral lasts only one night's wake, and whereas everyone in the village is duty-bound to participate, the crowd is expected to remain unmoved by such a death. This lack of emotion is in stark contrast with the funerals of people who are "still young" (mbo tanora), a loosely-defined category of people who are no longer children but are not yet old. Their death is a "waste" (mosera); the younger they are, the greater the waste of their death. Their funeral lasts longer than that of a child, and collective display of grief is common; especially at night, an outburst of crying close to the dead person may suddenly spread to the whole crowd, whose singing turns into a wail, while a few older people try to get things again under control.

Finally, when an old person (olo fantitra) dies, people are expected to be joyful (sambatsy), and the funeral must express this happiness. In what follows, I begin by briefly describing how the funerary routine of an old person is affected by the joy of the living, taking the example of the funeral of Dadikoroko, an old woman of Betania. I follow this by exploring why people are joyful, what it is that they celebrate and the significance of their celebration.

Dadikoroko died of old age. She was very tired (rerake mare); she stopped eating and slept all day. One day she was told that Safy, another very old woman in Betania, had died. Dadikoroko went back to sleep. As the crowd returning home from Safy's burial dispersed, her breath left her. The village was summoned for another funeral.¹²

When Dadikoro was young, she liked to dance. She was "a great devil" (devoly be): she was uninterested in the religion of the whites and never went to church to sing; she preferred dancing to singing hymns. Her funeral reflected her lifetime's tastes, as the crowd produced increasingly "ripe" feasts (fisa masake) during the three nights of her wake.¹³ Each night part of the crowd would begin to intone some hymns, trying very hard to sound happy rather than sad. But each night, a few hours into the wake, a different kind of humming would join the hymns, growing somewhere in the darkness, and a group of young men would start to dance gañaky: wrapped up in their

blankets, head and face wholly covered, they jumped up and down, holding tightly on to each other and panting loudly in increasing paroxysms of sound and movement. More and more people would join in, at first outside the lighted area around the house and then gradually moving into the light. Lined up in a long, winding snake men, women and children danced near and around the house. As the excitement mounted up, the crowd called upon Dadikoroko challenging her to join them. A tall, very skinny woman, almost as old as Dadikoroko, stood on the threshold of the house where Dadikoroko lay, dancing and looking sideways into the house; her stiff body was slowly transformed as she began to sway her hips and mimick her friend's seduction. Dadikoroko did not respond.

Dadikoroko's funeral lasted four days and three nights. When an old person dies, it is important that as many children, grandchildren and great grandchildren as possible arrive in time to participate in the burial (ho tsatsy faty, lit. "catching the deceased"). Hence, the funeral is extended to last three or four days -- but never any longer. In order to feed the mourners for such a long time, the dead person's family buys a live head of cattle instead of buying meat at the market. When the animal is taken to the mourners gathered around the deceased, a mock bull-fight will usually ensue; the animal, tied securely by the horns, is forced to run, to stop suddenly and to run again towards the crowd. Since the bull bought for Dadikoroko's funeral had lived nearly

wild in the forest, finding and capturing it was a long and exacting job that took up a small group of men; people waited for the bull for half a day. The delay added to the crowd's excitement when the bull, which had been shot down with a rifle but was still alive, was carried into the village on a wooden stretcher. As the carriers' singing was heard in the distance, the mourners ran to meet the men with their prey. The carriers acted out a bull-fight with the animal immobilized on the stretcher, running in circles and coming to a sudden halt. Women waved their sarongs in praise of the hunters, and surrounded the stretcher, dancing and singing more and more frenziedly and loudly. The bull was paraded around the house where Dadikoroko lay, and Dadikoroko was called upon by the crowd; jokes were shouted at her as a man hit the bull's testicles hard. Once more, Dadikoroko gave no reply.

When the dead person is old, the funeral should give them renown (malaza); distributing lots of fat meat at the communal meals ensures that people remember the deceased. Participants are encouraged to eat plentifully and they do so without hesitation, contrary to what they must do when the dead person is young. Since the crowd is expected to be joyful, the meal can be enjoyed and becomes a moment of celebration, of joyful conviviality with the deceased. But while people banqueted in Dadikoroko's name all around her house, Dadikoroko's body began to smell the sweet stench of decay.

I mentioned above that just before the coffin was nailed shut, Dadikoroko's grandchildren were summoned into the house. They were told, rather aggressively, to see that she was dead (io dadinao, fa maty io). As Dadikoroko was taken out of the house, the crowd was so excited and ready to move on that the "master of the corpse" nearly forgot to ask the grandchildren to step across the coffin. This was done, rather hurriedly, and the procession set off towards the cemetery.

It was midday and it was very hot. Dadikoroko was to be buried in the cemetery east of the village. Since at high tide the area between the village and the cemetery is flooded, when the tide ebbs it leaves a vast expanse of mud through which people had to walk knee-high to take Dadikoroko to her tomb. This did not prevent the procession from being wild and "ripe" (masake); wading through the mud and the effort of running through the swampy plain added to the crowd's frenzy. Men struggled to squeeze a shoulder under Dadikoroko's coffin, those at the nether end pushing forward and the others pushing backwards. Under such contrasting pressures, the coffin often came to a halt, swinging wildly while its bearers skidded and teetered in the mud. Around them, women roused the men in their efforts, or rather aroused them by dancing provocatively and swinging their hips against the men's pelvis. As soon as some bearers reacted to the provocation and began to dance with the women, other men took their place at the coffin.

In this instance the hazomanga was left to wait for a long time at the tombs. Eventually Dadikoroko got there, the white cloth over the coffin completely covered in mud and the coffin lid loose at one side. As the coffin moved closer to the tomb, the dancing, singing and writhing of bodies reached its acme. Finally Dadikoroko was handed over to the men standing inside the tomb who laid her in the grave, a speech like the one I described above was delivered to the crowd, and suddenly it was all over. On the way back to Betania, everyone took care to walk on the firmer patches of ground to avoid sinking in the mud; life was back to normal.

People rejoiced when Dadikoroko died because, like everyone who dies when they are old, she had "lasted a long time" (fa naharitsy). Her death was not a "waste" like that of people who die when they are "still young".

Old age comes after a life of growth and transformation; death stops this process by causing lack of breath and stillness. The main result of old age, however, is that an old person, both man and woman, has children (anaky), grandchildren (zafy), great-grandchildren (kitro). By "lasting for a long time", an old person sees and enjoys the sight of the generation of new life from the life s/he originally generated (see below, ch.5). On dying, Dadikoroko left behind the outcome of this generative chain. The "ripe" feast organized for her funeral -- the dances, bull-fights, abundant meals¹⁴

and wild procession -- celebrated this outcome. People expressed joy for Dadikoroko's long and successful life, not because of her death.

Nonetheless, Dadikoroko was dead. She was injected with formalin and she felt nothing. People danced around her and called on her to join what she used to like and was good at, and she never joined in. A bull-fight took place around her house, and she did not react. People ate in her honour and her body began to decay. Her coffin swung up and down amidst erotic dances, but at the end of it all she lay flat and still in her grave. Dadikoroko was proved dead by the display of life around her.

Nonetheless, the vitality displayed all around her proved also that Dadikoroko was not wholly dead. The crowd acted out the liveliness that she had produced, whose source Dadikoroko was. Dadikoroko may have been unable to dance herself, but in the course of the funeral she danced through her children, her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren. A most pleasing spectacle took shape as more and more people joined in. For a time, it seemed as if everyone in the dancing and singing crowd was one of Dadikoroko's descendants, and she appeared and could imagine herself as the generous ancestor of the whole crowd. Thanks to this spectacle, the funeral became a celebration that moved people to happiness.

Like all funerals, however, Dadikoroko's had to accomplish something quite different from the celebration of the good life of an aged grandmother. Because

Dadikoroko left life behind herself and because therefore she was not wholly dead, her grandchildren had to be told to look straight at her corpse to see that she was 'really' dead. As people explained, "the dead feel longing for the living" (olo maty manino an'olom-belo). This is a very dangerous kind of longing, which may cause the living to die (mahafaty); the greatest danger is caused by the strongest longing of all, that which a grandparent feels for his/her grandchildren. To neutralize this danger, the dead person must understand that s/he has to refrain from returning among the living, that s/he must leave them alone. Shouting at the grandchildren that Dadikoroko was dead was a way of shouting at Dadikoroko herself that she was entirely and wholly dead, despite the life she had produced and enjoyed.

The funeral staged a complex, contradictory and emotional play, whose parts proved both that Dadikoroko was dead and that she was not wholly so. At the end, however, the funeral was declared over and people were told to return home. As the crowd dispersed, Dadikoroko remained motionless in her grave, while the life that Dadikoroko had generated walked away from her and headed back towards the village. From that moment on, Dadikoroko will long for life and for the living. In the following chapter, we shall examine how the living appease from time to time this longing of the dead by breaking through the barrier between the two -- only to build an even firmer one as a result.¹⁵

Chapter 7. Notes

1. This process affects the entire coastal area near Morondava.

2. More in general, people use the formula sañatsia tany manintsy each time they mention something associated with death and the cemetery.

3. In fact, if one were to adopt Merina categorization, the Vezo would be 'right' in thinking that their cemeteries are hot. For the Merina, tombs and ancestors are cold because they stand for the positive ideal of regrouping, undifferentiation and the resolution of divisions experienced in lifetime; for the Vezo, tombs are hot because they represent the divisions that people ignore during their lives (see above, ch.5).

4. Abinal and Malzac (1987) translate Merina aina as "vie" and miaina as "être en vie, vivre, respirer, se retirer, se dilater". I render ay as "breath" (rather than "life") because my informants explained the term to me with a demonstration of breathing, even though they employed the term to mean "life".

5. See Feeley-Harnik 1979, 1984, 1986 for the distinction between 'hot work' and 'cold work' in the context of Bemihisatra (northern Sakalava) royal services; work involved in royal funerals is hot, all other services are cold.

6. In this dissertation I am not going to discuss Christianity, whose significance for the life of the people I knew well in Betania and Belo was very limited. In both villages there exist a katoliky and a protestante church; a proper service rarely takes place in either one. People will gather haphazardly on Sundays to sing in one of the two churches and consider that they mivavaky. Abinal and Malzac (1987:820) define vavaka as "le culte rendu à Dieu, la prière, l'adoration" and mivavaky as "prier, adorer". As far as I could understand, for the Vezo of Betania and Belo mivavaky implies no commitment to, or understanding of, Christian beliefs; it is restricted to actually going to church to sing. On the other hand, everyone knows the hymns sung at funerals

because everyone goes to funerals; I had the sense that most people associate hymns with funerals rather than with mivavaky. What Bloch (1971:142) writes about how church hymns are sung during Merina funerals applies equally well for the Vezo: "admittedly the songs are often Church hymns, but they are sung in a boisterous way which contrasts with the way they are sung in church".

7. For the Merina it is taboo to add salt to meat cooked at funerals "in case it is thought too good" (Bloch 1971:142).

8. The man whose house I rented in Betania was obsessed that his job at the local Gas Company prevented him from taking part in funerals in Betania. This was difficult and dangerous (sarotsy) and very bad (raty mare), since whom could he expect to sing at his wake when he died?

9. The 'automatism' of funerals is suggested for the Merina by Bloch (1971:142) and for Mayotte society by Lambek and Breslar (1986:404-5); by contrast with the Vezo, however, in both instances people's participation in the routine appears to be unthinking.

10. When the first funeral occurred in Betania, just over a month after my arrival there, I had to be extremely stubborn in order to attend the wake and communal meals. Everyone in my adoptive family seemed very keen to convince me that I should not go, for "it did not matter" (tsy mañahy) if I didn't. At the time, I interpreted their behaviour as trying to exclude me from something terribly important, and I felt that my responsibility as an anthropologist was to insist that I be involved in it. Most people looked surprised at seeing me at the communal meal and at the wake and went out of their way to make it understood that they approved of my presence at the funeral; my presence was even used in a public speech to chide the villagers who had not attended the wake. When the funeral was over, I felt grateful because I thought people had been generous to allow me to participate in it. I only later realized that the villagers were grateful to me, because I had given up my coolness in order to share with them the disruption caused by death. I also understood that my relatives' insistence that I need not attend the funeral was a way of suggesting that, as an outsider, I was under no obligation to take part and could therefore enjoy a good night's sleep and a proper meal at home.

11. The Vezo I worked with did not follow a codified form of mourning (misaona), allegedly because they follow the customs of "the people of the coast". Some informants told me what external signs of mourning the Vezo would use, were they prepared to do so. Men shave their hair and beard when they return from the cemetery, and then stop shaving for a whole year; women plait their hair and must

keep the same plaits for a whole year. Both men and women wear black clothes, which they also never change for a year. A friend argued that the reason the Vezo wear no signs of mourning is that people die so often, that one would have to have unkempt hair and black clothing year after year and one would look silly (adaladala). The reason the Vezo do not want to look silly is that they would overturn their previous effort to expell death from the village and restore coolness and normality. Similarly, there is little patience for people whose distress at the death of a relative or friend is considered too drawn out. Reactions to death are expected to differ between people according to their relationship with the deceased and according to the latter's status, especially her age (see below). When a strong, healthy and beautiful young man suddenly died in Betania, the whole village was shocked. After the funeral, the man's father fell into a state of deep grief and depression. Since my own house and that of my adoptive mother lay very close to this man's home, we could see him lying idle and staring into space for hours on end. For a few days his behaviour was considered normal, but only a couple of days after the funeral my mother began to show unease and to suggest to me and other members of our family that the man should not be left to brood all day, that someone should make him go out fishing so as to take his mind off his son's death, and that I should talk to him and give him some medicines. Although my mother was genuinely worried about the man's physical and mental well-being, she was also visibly disturbed by his sight, which reminded her (and us) of his son's death. Hearing her animated discussions of our neighbour, I felt that the reason she wished and urged the man's father to shake off his sadness was that only thus could the expulsion from village life of his son's 'wasteful' death (see below) be successfully concluded.

12. The fact that Dadikoroko's death followed so closely on Safy's was not seen to be especially significant, people remarking that the two women had been close friends and that they were both very old. It was nonetheless implied that Dadikoroko had waited for her friend's funeral to be over before dying herself, so as to avoid the logistical problems involved with having two funerals going on at the same time.

13. One must stress that it is the dead person who is thought to guide the living into performing the kind of funeral s/he desires. Since people's taste differ when they are alive, funerals differ accordingly. I chose to describe Dadikoro's funeral because she was particularly successful in making the crowd happy.

14. As I suggested above, when the dead person is old the communal meal should be what it must not be when the deceased is young. In order to explain the difference between the two, my informants drew an analogy with the

antinomy of joyfulness and sadness, of the celebration of a long and well-lived life and the pain caused by a wasted life. The emotional distinction between the two kinds of experience is obvious and recurs in all the other funeral acts. The meal, however, highlights the contrast through a particularly distressing image, similar to that in Bloch's (1985) analysis of the Merina myth that describes how the Merina used to eat their ancestors. The myth presents the practice of eating the corpse of a dead person as a way of avoiding putrefaction, since it would make people sad if their beloved were to rot under the ground. One day, however, a child dies and the horrifying prospect of eating it prompts the father to suggest substituting cattle for the corpse. Bloch (1985:637) notes the significance of the fact that the substitution occurs for the corpse of a child, for this "implies a reversal of the previously conjured image of eating the dead. The old situation which applied to previous generations, was that the young ate the old. The myth, however, evokes the image of the reverse, the image of the old eating the young". When the young feed on the old, descent is imagined as consubstantiality of different generations in which the young receive the blessing of the old; when the old feed on the young, however, descent becomes "a threat to the young who are to be consumed in their individuality before they have lived a full life". In Vezo funerals, the contrast between "the young feeding on the old" and "the old feeding on the young" is construed by contrasting the grandchildren's enjoyment at being fed by a generous grandparent with the careful avoidance of showing greed when the meal would imply conviviality with a "wasteful" (i.e. young) death.

15. My analysis of Vezo funerals differs significantly from Huntington's detailed study (1973b and Huntington & Metcalf 1979) of the funerary rituals of the Bara, a group of pastoralists who live in the interior of southern Madagascar. The reason for this is that the Bara's and the Vezo's conceptualization of the person appear to differ markedly. Huntington suggests that among the Bara the person is constituted by two separate elements (order versus vitality; male versus female; father versus mother; semen versus blood; bone versus flesh), which are in equilibrium when the person is alive; death breaks down the equilibrium, as "reality [moves] from a state of mediated equilibrium between order and vitality to a state of pure, fatal order" (1988:38). Among the Vezo, on the contrary, the dichotomy between life and death, between vitality and order is not within the person, but outside it. The living person is and aims to be only vital, transformable, 'unkinded'; order, permanency and 'kindness' exist only among the dead. What I have described as the shadow of death over the living, and what I will describe as the shadow of life among the dead (see below, Conclusion), do not lead to an equilibrium of opposite elements within the person. Given this difference

in the conceptualization of the person, it follows that Vezo and Bara funerals deal with different problems and try to achieve different ends. According to Huntington, Bara funerals aim at recreating the equilibrium between life and death by fighting back with absolute vitality (sexual excesses in particular) the absolute order of death. For a more general critique of Huntington see Bloch and Parry 1982; Bloch 1990.

CHAPTER 8

WORKING FOR THE DEAD

Betania's eastern cemetery (an-dolo-be) is surrounded by a thick and thorny forest, crossed by several narrow paths leading to the tombs. The paths are protected by a number of taboos or restrictions (faly); for example, they cannot be cleared of any obstruction, not even of the many thorny branches that make walking difficult and painful. The tombs are invisible until suddenly, only a few metres away, they emerge from the vegetation. They are ordered along a north-south axis on a narrow and slightly hilly strip of sand. Except for this orientation, the cemetery appears chaotic and crowded and there is little room to move around in. Forest shrubbery encroaches on the tombs, sometimes even growing inside them.

Tombs exist in different styles. Some are simple fences (vala) bounding some sand where the dead bodies are buried, not very deep; a number of crosses with the name of the deceased are stuck in the sand. The fence and the cross are made either of wood or cement. The fence

measures approximately 3m by 5m and is 1m high. Alternatively, there are large concrete 'boxes' (sasapoa) half-sunk in the sand and surrounded by a concrete fence. Elsewhere the tomb is a heap of stones covering some coffins, with crosses sticking up between the rocks.

On the basis of my informants' statements and explanations of Vezo customs (fombam-bezo), the typical Vezo tomb appears to be the vala. Sasapoa, which seem to be a recent innovation, are also considered to be a "good thing" (raha soa) because they allow many people to be buried together; the bodies are laid inside the 'box' without a coffin and therefore take up much less space. However, because starting a sasapoa implies exhuming previously buried bodies and exhumation is taboo for most Vezo, this kind of tomb is rarely built. Heaping stones over the dead is considered unusual in Betania, but is more commonly practised in Belo and is supposed to be quite common in Tulear; people in Betania see it as a practice of outsiders (vahiny).

Although I came to consider whitewashed concrete fences as the cemetery's most prominent feature, such fences are in fact built to substitute pre-existing wood fences, and wood is therefore as much or more a part of the landscape. Besides the wood fences that are still in place, wooden remains of dismantled tombs are scattered along the cemetery borders, and other wood fences are in the process of collapsing.

Wood fences can be made with roughly-cut poles hewn directly in the surrounding forest, or with boards and carved poles that are built into elaborate structures, sometimes with sculptures standing on top of four or six of the main poles.¹ Fences of the first kind are temporary structures, built at the time of burial if a place in an already established (concrete) tomb is unavailable; in due course, the temporary fence is dismantled and the concrete one is built in its place. The same occurs for the crosses; a first, temporary wooden cross will later be replaced by a concrete one.² Fences of the second kind are regarded instead as a feature of the past before concrete came into use; they are thought to belong to people whose descendants have emigrated, for otherwise the wood would have been replaced.³

In this chapter I examine the two rituals whereby concrete is substituted for wood. The first ritual consists of the building of the concrete fence; the second, of the moulding, raising and carrying of concrete crosses to the tomb. Although the two rituals are sometimes performed within a short interval of each other, they constitute distinct enterprises, and it will usually take many years after the fence is built for the wood crosses inside it to be replaced with concrete ones. Accordingly, I begin by describing those aspects of the two rituals that are similar; I follow this by examining each ritual in its own right.

Building tombs and crosses is "work" (asa) that the living perform for the dead.⁴ The building of a new fence is called asa lolo (asa = work, lolo = tomb, i.e. the fence); the making of concrete crosses is often referred to just as "our work" (asantsika).⁵ This work is the responsibility of the living towards the dead. The dead desire nice, clean, proper tombs. If the living fail in their duty to build new fences and crosses, the ancestors will make known their discontent. This will begin with a visitation of dreams and minor illnesses, in response to which the hazomanga may try to talk to the ancestors to reassure them that the desired work will be undertaken soon. If the promise is not kept, however, the ancestors may get very angry (melohe mare) and "make people die" (mahafaty).

On their part, the living enjoy what might be termed the 'aesthetic values' of the tombs they build for the dead. Each of the three times I took part in an asa lolo, I was called by some of the men once the work had been completed and people began to disperse to go home and was urged to admire the result: the fence was beautiful and good (soa), and I was expected to agree. To ask why a concrete fence is soa would have been offensive. In fact, on observing the effort and care with which men dug the sand to lay solid foundations, I realized that concrete fences are beautiful because they stand straight, firm and even on loose and shapeless sand. Similarly, concrete crosses are admired for being big, heavy, solid objects,

in stark contrast with the flimsy wood crosses they replace.

In a subtle way, the desires of the dead and the living coincide. The dead view the performance of the rituals as the way to be remembered and looked after by the living. The living think of them as a blessing (asantsika ro tsipiranontsika), for when the ancestors are happy they stop interfering with the life, dreams and health of live people; building solid fences and crosses is a manner of separating themselves from the dead.

When the hazomanga announces to the ancestors the building of a new "house" (trano)⁶ or of concrete crosses, he is concerned that the work be considered a token of respect (fanaja) reflecting a genuine desire to make the ancestors happy, rather than a response to the ancestors' threat. When the hazomanga asserts that "this work is not your work, it is ours" (asa ty tsy asanareo fa asanay), he implies that the dead might do the work themselves, but that the living have chosen instead to serve and please their ancestors by doing the work for them. Despite this suggestion, however, the ancestors cannot build tombs and crosses for themselves because they are dead, breathless and motionless. In what follows I show how the vitality displayed by the living in their work for the dead enacts this paradox very clearly.

Building a tomb and the crosses inside it is the responsibility of people of a specific 'kind', the living

people who will be buried in that tomb and join the raza there. These people are the "masters of the work" (tompon'asa); their leader is the hazomanga. When people act as "masters of the work", they recognize and activate the shadow of the raza. Although as living people they are not members of the raza yet, as "masters of the work" they constitute themselves collectively as those who will join it.⁷ When the "masters of the work" are planning the work and putting aside money for it, their reference to "our work" (asantsika)⁸ draws a clear distinction between themselves and everyone else. It is a distinction that is normally not present, because membership of the raza is not relevant for the living. Thus, when the living build fences for the dead -- which fences divide the dead in 'kinds' --, they experience the same divisiveness that the fences create among the dead;⁹ the "masters of the work" act as a 'kind' of people while the rest remain 'unkinded'. Not surprisingly, the organization of the work makes the "masters of the work" hot, whereas those who are not involved stay nicely cool. It is important to note, however, that the actual work is performed not only by the "masters of the work" but by a large, 'unkinded' crowd. The "masters of the work" invite many people to participate in building the fence, and for the cross ritual they extend invitations to the entire village and to all their relatives. As we shall see, this is a crucial feature of the ritual, because the dead enjoy being surrounded by all their children, grandchildren and great-

grandchildren with no regard for 'kinds' and the divisions between them.

Both the cross and the fence ritual require a considerable financial commitment in order to buy building materials, food and plenty of rum for the participants, and the diviner's counsel. Although the cost of building materials is normally higher for building the fence, the cost of food and drink is considerably greater for the cross ritual because many more people are invited to attend.

The "masters of the work" begin to collect money among themselves by subscription (cotisacion, Fr. subscription, quota, share) months before the ritual is enacted.¹⁰ Each person's contribution is carefully annotated in a notebook, as are (or should be) all expenses. Contributions (enga) of money, cattle, rum or beer are also expected from everyone invited to attend the last stage of the cross ritual when the crosses are taken to the cemetery. In one case, total expenditure for the two rituals was 707.620FMG,¹¹ plus two heads of cattle and one case of beer. Of this sum, 151.000FMG, the cattle and the case of beer were received as enga; the "masters of the work"'s contribution was therefore 556.620FMG.¹²

This huge sum of money (approximately the value of 1100kg of Spanish mackerels, nine canoes, four large bulls, or 600kg of rice) "comes from the sea" (vola bakan-drano) like all other Vezo income (see above, ch.2). Although one contribution to the cotisacion came from

Fañolana, a young Antandroy man employed by a local retailer, the work's success was always stated to depend on fishing. In fact, such "big work" (asa bevata) could only be accomplished if one was "very Vezo" (Vezo mare), that is, only by very successful fishing. This is the reason why the rituals are performed towards the end of the cold season (during September and October),¹³ for the best fishing period occurs during the preceding months and earnings are thus likely to be high. When my family began to plan the two rituals, everyone repeated as if to ward off bad luck that the work would be done at a certain time if Ndrañahary (God¹⁴) protected them; family members who failed to contribute to the cotisation were told disapprovingly: "and yet you catch plenty of fish every day" (kanefa, mahazo fia maro isanandro isanandro nareo).

Considering that a fundamental Vezo trait is the inability to "manage money" (see above, ch.2), the fact that the work for the dead is financed by being "very Vezo" and by saving on short-term consumption on food, drink and clothes is rather surprising. While the work was still in its preparatory stages, my family endlessly discussed the best way to achieve the necessary savings. They finally agreed that the five brothers and sisters, their mother and older sons and daughters would pay their quotas in small instalments; the cash was to be collected and kept at the hazomanga's (the eldest brother). Many of them failed to contribute, however, claiming that they were keeping the money at home and would hand it over once

they had saved the full amount. Although they never said so to his face, it appeared that they did not trust the hazomanga, or rather that they took it for granted that if in need he would use the collective fund for private purposes.¹⁵ One of his sisters, however, dismissed this apparent suspicion as an excuse by her relatives to shirk their duties, telling them instead that she doubted that they would ever succeed in saving any money if they kept it at their own home. The only way to save the necessary sum, she said, was to set aside 1000, 500 or even as little as 200FMG from their daily earnings and to remove it immediately from their house, this being the only way to avoid spending the money on food, snacks or clothes. Although this woman often exhorted her relatives to be wise, most of the time she charged them with being the opposite (ttsy mahihitsy nareo!).

Discussions in my family suggest that people are aware that in order to meet their responsibilities towards the ancestors they are forced to plan and save in ways that are foreign to their customary behaviour. Thus, no-one ever suggested that the money they had put aside might have been spent more profitably if it were not for the work to be done for the dead. It was taken for granted that the 1000, 500 or 200FMG to be set aside daily for the work on the tombs would otherwise have been spent in immediate gratification. The wise woman did nothing to challenge this attitude. Noting that to spend money in such a way is incompatible with live people's duty towards

the dead, she was merely stressing that her siblings had to abandon their customary behaviour in order to succeed in building a permanent tomb.

Although in practical terms the woman's strictures are straightforward (tombs are expensive and people must save money in order to build them), its ideological implications are more interesting, for the woman was drawing a clear distinction between two opposite "transactional orders".¹⁶ The first order is the concern and normal practice of the living as Vezo people; the other pertains to relations between the living and the ancestors. By succeeding in saving money only when they have to build tombs and crosses for the dead, Vezo experience the contrast between this enterprise and their customary short-term, unplanned economic behaviour that generates 'surprise'. Through this experience, the living create the separation between themselves and the ancestors. The difference between life and death can be understood in no better way than by looking at the outcome of the two "transactional orders": permanent, lasting concrete fences and crosses on the one hand, transitory and sensual gratification on the other.

As with all other major undertakings, a favourable day (andro soa) must be chosen for things to go smoothly and safely during the ritual's performance, and a diviner (ombiasa) is consulted for this purpose (mila andro, "to ask for the day"). Although people will often hazard a

guess whether a day is favourable or not, the matter is so "difficult" (raha sarotsy) that no-one wishes to risk a mistake. In fact, while it is advisable to undertake all activities concerning the ritual and its preparation on "good days", it is crucial to do so for the more "difficult" acts. For the asa lolo, for example, the bricks for the fence can either be moulded at the village or can be bought ready-made. In the first case, the diviner will certainly be consulted; in the second case, people may trust their own judgement as to the right day for buying the bricks and carrying them to the village. If the building materials are taken near the cemetery before the ritual, however, the day for doing so must needs be chosen by the diviner.

A further essential requisite for the ritual's success is a specially prepared medicine called fanintsina. The medicine, which is prepared by the diviner a few days before the work is done, is used in both rituals prior to and on the way to the cemetery; it is made each time with a special combination of ingredients dissolved in water. The medicine's effectiveness may vary, and this is often commented on at the end of the ritual: if no fights break out, no accidents occur and everything goes smoothly, people say that the fanintsina was good (soa) and strong (mahery).

The root of the term fanintsina is nintsy, which means "cold". When I asked whether fanintsina is meant to keep people 'cool', my friends would explain that fanintsina is

meant to prevent fights among the ritual's participants and to counter people people being silly (adaladala) when they drink too much rum. Hence, large amounts of fanintsina are spraid over the crowd when the dancing and singing gets too excited or when arguments between drunk men flare up. Fanintsina is also used by the "masters of the work" just before they leave for the cemetery. Everyone -- man, woman and child -- must get their share; following the diviner's instructions, people either sip the medicine a set number of times or smooth their hair back with it, or do both. The ancestors also get a share of fanintsina when the hazomanga sprinkles it over their tomb to ensure that they behave well while the work is under way.

the asa lolo

The day when the work at the tombs takes place, the ancestors must be informed. In one case this announcement was first made in the hazomanga's house at the village and was then briefly repeated at the cemetery; usually it was uttered only in front of the fence which was to be rebuilt.

The main purpose of the announcement is to inform the ancestors about what will happen so that they will not be surprised (tsy hotseriky nareo).¹⁷ At the same time, the hazomanga asks the ancestors to recognize their descendants' merits for not forgetting them and for looking after them. Finally, the hazomanga asks the

ancestors to protect the living as they approach the ancestors' home in order to dismantle it and build a new and better one.

When a tape-recorder was once taken to the cemetery to make the dancing "riper", the hazomanga was especially concerned that the ancestors should be given due warning, telling them that

they [the ancestors' descendants] are really happy because they have got this thing, this 'electrophone', a thing of whites; they're showing it to you because they're happy. We're informing you, the ancient raza, so that you won't be surprised and won't say: 'how is it that when these grandchildren, when these children get something, they don't remember us?' [As you can see], this is not true, because we are now calling you and informing you.¹⁸

The hazomanga was not worried that the ancestors might dislike the tape-recorder; rather, he was concerned that they might think that they had been forgotten and excluded from the living people's fun.

On arriving at the cemetery, the hazomanga sprinkles a few drops of fanintsina inside the tomb where the work is to be done. The old wood fence is dismantled and the men (including those invited to the asa lolo) begin to discuss the building of the new one, estimating how large a fence

can be made with the number of available bricks and how to design holes in the walls so as to save on materials and make a larger or taller fence. Most men carry the building materials, for only a small number (always the same individuals at each ritual I witnessed) have the necessary building skills and stay sober enough to raise a straight wall. Meantime, some young boys clear a shaded area under the trees, where the elderly and those who soon stop pretending to be of any use in the work can sit. Most men will eat their meal in the shade, whereas the few employed in building the fence tend to eat where they are, sitting on top of the dead and leaning over the crosses.

The women's task is to help cooking and distributing the meal. They usually arrive at the cemetery later than the men because they have to wait at the village for the women who, first thing in the morning, leave for the market to buy rice, meat, onions, tomatoes and tsaka (green, pungent leaves) for the communal meal. When the women accompanied by children arrive at the tombs carrying pots, buckets, plates, spoons and food, they clear an area and transform it into a kitchen. When the food is ready, the women dish out rice and meat on big plates, the number of spoons on each plate indicating how many people should eat out of each dish. The men, who are served first, often hide a spoon so as to increase their individual portions, and send a young boy over to the women to show that their plate is still full of rice but has no more meat or broth on it. The women give generous portions, but they also

make sure that enough food is left for themselves. On one occasion, when the men were overly insistent in asking for more food, the women hid a small pot of meat and broth under a basket; when the men demanded more broth they were shown the big, nearly empty pot and were told to be content with what they had.

The food cooked at the cemetery is meant to make people full and should be good, tasty (the meat is cooked with onions, tomatoes and tsaka) and plentiful. At one asa lolo, the main attraction and source of amusement and laughter was a woman who, holding a spoon in each hand, stuffed herself with rice and meat, screwed up her eyes and made silly faces.

If food is an important element of the ritual, rum is essential. The work cannot be accomplished without rum because, as I was told, Malagasy people can work very hard but they need to be supplied with liquor. Although the "masters of the work" are expected not to drink much before the work is finished, there will always be some members in the family, both men and women, who drink heavily from the start and get scolded by their 'wiser' relatives.

Much of the interaction between women and children on the one hand and men on the other concerns rum. In theory at least, the source of drink should be only one, a few plastic jerrycans supervised by a trustworthy man and kept where men sit and work. Only one bottle is passed around, and is refilled from time to time. The bottle tends to be

monopolized by the men; only rarely is a young boy sent to offer a round of drinks to the women. The latter complain strongly and make a great fuss over how much each of them gets when the bottle finally reaches them. After a while, however, those men who are too drunk to get more drink from the 'official' source come over to the women to beg for a little more, for everyone knows that the women always have a small 'reserve' hidden among their pots and buckets. For my family's asa lolo, the women's secret reserve was bought by the hazomanga's wife with money I had contributed to a last-minute cotisacion; since the hazomanga was absent, his wife took the money without registering it among the official contributions, at the same time asking for my assent and complicity in this little bit of fun the women were going to have.

Having fun at the tombs is important. Although the Vezo say that they are not very good at making 'ripe' feasts, people do not find it hard to amuse themselves. Above all, they enjoy dancing, and they found that having a tape-recorder helped a lot. Their favourite dance is minotsoky, whose sexual overtones -- the dance consists of rotating and thrusting the pelvis back and forth, preferably against and in unison with someone else's -- are too obvious to be dwelt upon. Partly for this reason, grown-ups have few occasions when dancing minotsoky is appropriate;¹⁹ the asa lolo is one.

People stay at the cemetery, dancing and drinking, until the building of the fence is completed. After the

meal, having cleared up and packed the cutlery and utensils brought from the village, the women have time to look more closely at the new fence together with the rest of the crowd. The few men still at work are pressed to join the dance, and the others dance next to them inside the fence. When the construction is finally over, the sand inside the fence is swept even and clean and the tools have been gathered together, someone asks for silence and attention. As the noise of the crowd slowly dies down, someone who is known to be a good orator gives a short speech. After announcing that he speaks in the hazomanga's stead, he thanks the crowd for their contribution to the completion of such a "big work" (asa bevata io); had it not been for their help the work could not have been successfully undertaken. Ndrañahary is also thanked, for without Ndrañahary's help people would not have been strong enough. There have been no obstacles to the work, everything has gone well and has been done well from morning to eve; there have been no fights or disagreements, only play and banter. Now it is time to disperse and return home (dia ravo tsika zao holy).

The crowd now disperses and heads back to the village; some people are so drunk that they need help to do so, others have to be dragged back home. Back at the village, all feasting, dancing and drinking must normally stop. In one instance, however, things were not called off, the hazomanga himself encouraging people to look for new batteries for the tape-recorder and giving money to buy

more rum; the crowd regrouped around his house. But later that evening people came to announce that a young man, a classificatory son of the hazomanga's wife, had died of tetanus in Belo. Since both the hazomanga and his wife were too drunk to be able to receive the messengers, the hazomanga's eldest sister, who had disapproved of her brother's behaviour all along, forced the feast to an end: she took the batteries out of the tape-recorder and shouted that people were to return home, for things were now over (fa vita). In the aftermath of this incident, she found countless opportunities to recriminate about her brother's behaviour. That his wife had been unfit to listen to the announcement of the death of a son showed unmistakably how wrongly he had behaved. In particular, he had been unwise (tsy mahihitsy) in bringing back to the village what should have ended at the cemetery: "once it's over it's over" (lafa vita, fa vita). It was no coincidence that the news of the boy's death had come when it had.

Let us briefly summarize the process of asa lolo. The living, who are responsible for building nice tombs for the dead, must enter the cemetery to do so. Several precautions are taken to do it safely, by choosing a favourable day for the work and by using fanintsina. The ancestors must also be informed about what is going to happen to their 'home'; in addition, they are asked to protect the living who prove, by looking after them, their

remembrance and care. Many people are invited to the asa lolo, more than are needed to carry out the work itself. When the men arrive at the cemetery, they dismantle the old wood fence and proceed to build a new concrete one; the women follow them a while later with food for the communal meal. People eat and enjoy large quantities of tasty food; there is plenty of rum. While the fence is being built, most people (in a state of lesser or greater drunkenness) dance around it and have fun. Once the work is completed, people are thanked for their help in undertaking such a "big work" and everyone returns home. The ritual is over.

The core of the ritual clearly occurs between the dismantling of the old fence and the completion of the new one. Having ensured that a favourable day has been chosen, that the ancestors have been informed and that the tomb has been sprinkled with fanintsina, when the fence is dismantled the living suspend all the caution, hesitance or reticence that they normally feel in coming into contact with the heat of the cemetery. People walk, dance, stamp their feet, drink and eat inside the tomb and over the corpses of the dead.

People are aware that this behaviour is "surprising" (mahatseriky). Not only did they tell me that my friends abroad would be surprised to see pictures of the asa lolo and hear that the people I had lived with in Madagascar dance and eat inside the tombs; they also ritually warn and exhort their own ancestors not to be surprised by this

behaviour. Indeed, they often seemed as surprised themselves by what they did as they expected my friends and feared their ancestors would be.

The cause of the 'surprise' can be seen to be that the asa lolo upsets and temporarily destroys the normal distinction between the cemetery and the village, between the dead and the living. During the asa lolo the living bring within the bounds of the cemetery what is normally outside it. They take life, and with life they take breathing, cooking, eating, drinking, dancing and a large crowd of 'unkinded' people. They invade the cemetery with life.

Although the ostensible reason for doing this is that the living must provide the dead with a new and clean house, when the hazomanga warns the ancestors about what is about to happen, he stresses that by building the fence the living are showing remembrance and concern for the dead. These are the dead's strongest desires, because "the dead long for the living" (olo maty manino an'olom-belo) (see above, ch.7). Yet, although by bringing life into the cemetery the living are responding to this longing, what the living perform over the dead persons' bodies and inside their tomb is more a parody of life than a representation of reality and 'coolness'. Thus, for example, although live people in their village homes eat food that is as tasty and satisfying as that which is eaten around the tombs, they do not deliberately make fools of themselves by stuffing their mouths with two

spoons and making comic faces. When people invade the cemetery, they do something more than staging a spectacle of life for the dead: they exaggerate their liveliness, they overstate the fact that they are "living people" (olom-belo) rather than dead.

The fact that the living do so is crucial. In the same way as Dadikoroko was proved dead by contrast with the vitality enacted around her during her funeral (see above, ch.7), during the tomb ritual the living demonstrate that the ancestors are dead by contrasting life and death most sharply, at the point in which their customary distance and separation is temporarily transformed into close proximity. When the living stamp their feet as hard as they can and dance erotic dances on top of the dead, they imagine that the dead underneath them enjoy the feast -- if the ancestors didn't, the living would be "dead on the spot" (maty sur place). The dead like having the tape-recorder blast music over their heads for they desire to share in live people's activities and fun -- for this reason the hazomanga first made sure that the dead did not feel excluded. Yet, although the living stamp their feet to please the dead, the ancestors are nonetheless dead: they cannot join in the dance, or respond to the rythm of the music and the provocative movements of minotsoky. They remain silent and motionless, as they hear life echoing through the sand.

The moment when the old, flimsy fence is dismantled is intensely dramatic: for the ancestors, it marks the

beginning of their spectacle of life; for the living, it marks the beginning of an emotionally charged contiguity with the dead. When the fence is removed, no barrier is left to separate the living from the dead. This is frightening and horrifying.²⁰ By taking down the barrier marking the boundary between death and life the dead are allowed to enjoy life; at the same time and for the same reason the living run the risk of 'enjoying' death. The living endure the horror of this because they hope that by pleasing the dead they will be left alone and will not be pursued by the longing of the dead for life. Their response to the fear of proximity with the dead is to devote all energies and vitality to making themselves as alive as they possibly can.

The spectacle of life for the dead and the near hysterical display of super-vitality by the living last only as long as it takes to complete the new fence. Then the living, carrying their pots, buckets and empty jerrycans, return home. The dead are left behind inside a new, firmer and more permanent barrier.

the cross ritual

Building the concrete fence is only the first stage of the work the living perform for the ancestors. It is followed by the cross ritual, in which all the wooden crosses inside one tomb -- the tomb of "one people" (olo raiky) and of "one kind of people" (raza raiky) -- are replaced with concrete crosses. The cross ritual lasts longer,

involves more people, costs more and is more elaborate than the building of the fence. The end of the ritual, when the concrete crosses stand upright inside the fence cleared of all rotting wood, produces a strong sense of accomplishment. The living have met the desire of the ancestors and their longing.

The ritual (see Fig.4) lasts between five and seven days according to the diviner's instructions about favourable days. It starts when the crosses are moulded at the village (manily lakroa) by a small crowd which is invited to undertake the work and is fed by the organizers. On the following days, the names of the deceased are engraved on the crosses, the wood moulds are removed and the crosses are painted. On the afternoon before the day when they will be carried to the cemetery, the crosses are raised (mananga lakroa); immediately after, the participants' contributions (enga) to the ritual are presented to the "masters of the work". In the meantime, women cook huge amounts of food for the crowd. Between the day when the crosses are first moulded and the day when they are removed from the village, wakes are held near them. To begin with, the wakes are held only by the "masters of the work", but on the last night it becomes a major event which is supposed to attract and entertain a large crowd. At dawn of the final day the crosses are carried to the cemetery (atery an-dolo). The procession can either be very quiet and uneventful or frenzied and wild, according

FIG.4-THE CROSS RITUAL

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
MANILY LAKROA moulding of crosses at the village	crosses are left to dry	crosses are left to dry names are engraved on crosses	wood moulds are removed crosses are painted	guests begin to gather 3 o'clock MANANGA LAKROA crosses are raised ENGA contributions paid to "masters of the work" SAKAFO communal meal	ATERY AN-DOLO processions carry crosses to the cemetery FA VITA ritual is over people disperse and return to village
NIGHT	NIGHT	NIGHT	NIGHT	NIGHT	
MIARITORY wake with few people (only "masters")	MIARITORY wake with few people (only "masters")	MIARITORY wake with few people (only "masters")	MIARITORY wake with a few more people ("masters" and friends)	MIARITORY FISA wake and feast with huge crowd	

to the status of the dead person whose cross it is. When the crosses reach the cemetery and are placed inside the fence, the crowd is thanked and asked to go home. The ritual is over.

The work starts with the building of the crosses (manily lakroa). The building materials and tools are collected in advance next to the house that will be the stage for the entire process before the crosses are carried to the cemetery. Although the crosses are usually built at the hazomanga's house in virtue of his role as "master of the crosses" (tompon'lakroa), other people can beg (mangataky) and obtain (mahazo) the cross or crosses²¹ from him. In one instance, a son begged his half-brother (same father but different mothers) for his mother's cross. The hazomanga replied that had it been someone else, he would not have surrendered the cross, but that since the request came from someone who had been generated (anaky naterany) by the woman whose cross was being built, he would give his assent and his blessing.

The people invited to take part in the work arrive in a trickle early in the morning. Men and women gather in different areas near the house where they will perform their different tasks, the women cooking and the men building the crosses.

Under the shade of an improvised awning, the men divide into small working groups, each of whom is responsible for making a wooden mould. Although I never followed the men's

work closely, I overheard their discussions about the crosses' plan and design; the shape varies considerably, ranging from a traditional cross to a diamond-shaped object with quite elaborate ornaments. Sometimes bold and innovative designs are rejected because of their technical impracticality. The main consideration, however, is that the dead person's seniority be reflected in the shape and size of their cross. Children's crosses should be short, narrow and with few frills; the children's grandparents' and parents' crosses must be much taller, wider and heavily decorated. The cross and the person it represents are explicitly made to identify when the crosses are built, and we shall see below that the crosses become these people during the ritual, their size, weight and beauty recreating the bodily presence of the dead among the living.

When people reach general agreement about the crosses' dimensions each party starts on its own work. Due to the limited number of tools available and the small number of skilled carpenters, however, most work is done rather confusedly by sharing out both tools and skills between the different groups. When the frames are finished, concrete is poured inside, reinforced with metal rods. Although many more people are involved in this work compared with the building of the fence, as in the asa lolo a large number of them gradually drop out of the task.

As usual, the women are in charge of cooking the meal. When those who went to the market return with the ingredients, the other women begin winnowing the rice, cutting up the meat, dicing tomatoes and onion, and cleaning the bunches of tsaka. Fires are lit and pots of rice and one with meat are lined up under the sun; women have their own awning to which they retreat after tending the fire and supervising the cooking. The cooked food is served to the men, who stop working, eat and send back their empty dishes. It is now the women's turn to eat.

Once, due to the late return of the women who had gone to the market, the crosses were almost finished by the time the meal was over; most people dispersed immediately after eating. Another time things were better organized and the meal was served much earlier. A record-player had been set up under the men's awning and, after the meal, women and children began to dance; the men were clearly shy, and only a few of them danced following pressing invitations from some of the women. A sister of mine whispered that if I wanted to dance minotsoky I should wait until dark.

Although rum is available, it is not provided in the same quantities as for the asa lolo and it would seem that no-one expects it to be plentiful. Once, when the crosses were moulded at my family's hazomanga's, I volunteered to buy some extra rum; later I was secretly asked by one person there to do so a second time. After this I realized that the 'wiser' members of my family had disapproved of

my initiative, since they did not think it necessary for anyone to get drunk.

My impression during this first stage of the cross ritual was that work, food, dancing and rum were 'neutral' and no different from normal life. The reason for this is that the crosses are still unfinished and what they will represent is still absent. The crosses are yet to be 'activated', they are yet to acquire the double imagery of dead bodies and live ancestors that I discuss below.

Once the crosses are ready, they are carefully moved to a central point of the yard east of the hazomanga's house. They are lined up on the ground next to each other, with the senior person's cross to the north and the others ranked southwards in descending order of seniority. The point of the cross is always oriented eastwards and its base westwards, which is how dead bodies lie during funerals and inside the tombs. Sometimes a kind of protective fencing is built around the crosses with a few wooden poles and coconut palm branches; during the hottest hours of the day, canoe sails are raised as an awning so as to avoid the concrete cracking in the sun. After a day of drying, the names and, if known, the dates of birth and death are engraved on the crosses, preceded by French expressions like ici git, ici repose. These inscriptions are made by a relative of the dead person, typically by young people known for their good calligraphy, and are not marked off in a ritual manner.²²

As far as I could understand, the choice of when the wood frames are to be removed is determined solely by the time it takes for the concrete to dry thoroughly. Although no formal gathering is called for this occasion, all the family members try to be present when the frames are removed and the operation's success or failure become manifest. If a part of a cross breaks or cracks, this is interpreted as a sign that the ancestor is unhappy and angry about the living people's doings (hadisoa). In the case of a woman whose body was 'begged' by her husband and was then granted to her children (see above, ch.6), one of her cross's decorations broke off. Although her father and brothers, who were all extant, had previously expressed their discontent for the fact that the woman's husband had taken more than fifteen years to build the concrete cross for her,²³ the crack in the cross (which was later carefully repaired) proved to the onlookers that the woman herself was also unhappy about the delay.

After the frames have been removed, the crosses are given two coats of paint: front and back white, the sides a light blue or green, the lettering in black. Until they stay at the village the crosses will thus be shiny, bright and clean; during 'ripe' processions, however, they will lose most of their paint on the way to the tombs and get covered with dirty hand-prints. If there is any fresh paint left over, the cross may be given a quick coat as it stands inside the tomb; otherwise it is left as it is. Although people complain that, as with everything else

they buy, the quality of the paint has deteriorated while increasing in price, they do not seem to mind about the cross's appearance at the tombs, nor do they think the dead mind either -- probably because the dead are more interested in the dancing and are prepared to put up with cheap paint that does not dry properly and peels off too easily.

When the paint is dry the crosses are left lying on the sand; the fencing built to protect them when the concrete was still soft and the paint wet is dismantled. Everything is ready for the final stage of the ritual.

At three o'clock in the afternoon of the day indicated by the diviner the "crosses are raised" (mananga lakroa). The crosses are lifted in descending order of seniority to a standing position with the help of a wooden framework built previously for this purpose behind and east of the crosses themselves; the side of the cross bearing the dead person's name faces westwards. This operation is done by men. A small crowd gathers in a semi-circle around the crosses as they are raised up; when they are all standing the crowd starts to sing church hymns.

The raising of the crosses arouses intense emotions among the onlookers. The people most closely related to the persons represented by the crosses are often moved to tears; if this occurs, other onlookers will exhort them to stop. As the cross of the woman who had died giving birth to her eleventh child was raised, more than fifteen years

after her death, her children were visibly moved. The woman's husband later explained to me that raising dead people's crosses in this way is a "very good thing" (raha soa mare) for two reasons: first, because people who were unable to get to the funeral in time -- who "did not catch the corpse" (tsy tsatsy ny faty) -- can compensate by seeing the dead person's cross; second, because the children who have not known their mother in life now have the opportunity of seeing her (farany fa hitan-drozy nenin-drozy, "at last they see their mother").

The reasons this man gave that render the cross ritual a good thing (mahasoa azy) indicate that the ritual rests on a fundamental paradox. The first reason implies that the ritual re-enacts the funeral; in this context, the cross is a substitute for the corpse. The second reason, however, is that the children see not their mother's corpse but their mother (nenin-drozy). In other words, the man was stating that the cross not only substitutes the woman's dead body, but also recalls her presence as a living person. This paradox is expressed in the process of raising the crosses from a flat to a vertical position. Lying flat on the sand, the crosses are substitutes of dead bodies; as such, it would make little sense to raise them from that position. By raising them to a standing position, they and those they represent are brought back to life: hence the emotionally charged atmosphere among their living kin.

The dimension of life incorporated in the crosses is crucial to the cross ritual's general understanding. Two seemingly incompatible performances are going on at the same time: the dead are brought back to life, and their funeral is re-enacted with a mock corpse. One reading of the paradox is that the living can be moved to perform mock funerals for mock corpses only if they have first recreated the image of live bodies and lively lives; the case of Be-nono (the cross with two large concrete breasts) which I discuss below lends support to this interpretation. A second, complementary reading is that the contrasting imagery conveyed by the cross -- both live ancestor and mock corpse -- accomodates the contrasting desires of the dead and the living. Whereas the dead are given an opportunity to savour and remember life as part of the service they expect from the living, this opportunity is granted by re-enacting a funeral which ends, as all funerals do, with the dead within their tombs and the living in the village. The ritual recreates and reinforces the barrier between living people and ancestors.

Before developing these ideas any further, however, let us briefly return to the course of events that follow the raising of the crosses. Through a description of the wake and of the processions which convey the crosses to the cemetery, we shall get a clearer understanding of how the dual, conflicting imagery of the cross is expressed and confronted.

After the crosses have been raised up, the onlookers present their contributions to the "masters of the work". The hazomanga and one or two other senior men, usually his brothers, sit in his house, while small parties of men (women are seldom included) queue up outside waiting for their turn. As one group leaves, another asks permission to enter and is invited inside. The visitors sit down, chat a few moments about the weather or about their journey; then, with a sudden change in his tone of voice, the senior visitor hands an envelope with some money to the hazomanga, who receives it with thanks. After some further small talk, the group leaves and another one comes in. A deep sense of boredom transpires from the entire procedure.

As soon as one lot of visitors leaves the house, the envelope is opened, the money is counted and the sum is written down in a notebook together with the donor's name. Contributions can vary considerably, from a minimum of 500 or 1000FMG to sums in the range of 20000-30000FMG. Enga can, however, also be in kind: a head of cattle, one or more jerrycans of rum, or one or more cases of beer. Their value differs considerably,²⁴ but they share the manner in which they are given to the "masters of the work".

The giving of enga in kind gives rise to a frenzied procession, similar to the bull-fights that occur during funerals of old people. If the enga is an animal, it is forced to stage a mock bull-fight with a long rope tied securely around its horns, while the crowd runs, dances,

sings, claps, laughs, shouts and screams around it. If the enga is a case of beer or a jerrycan of rum, it is secured to a pole and is carried by an excited group of youngsters who will also act out mock bull charges and feints against the crowd. This game will begin at some distance from the house where the hazomanga is receiving the enga and will make long detours before finally reaching its destination. To begin with, the procession includes only the enga's contributors, but soon more and more people (including many of the "masters of the work") are drawn into it. As the crowd approaches the hazomanga's house and the crosses, a leading member of the group presenting the enga is borne in triumph waving two sticks with paper notes stuck on them; this money is also part of the enga.

Who contributes what and how much plays a very important role in reflecting and creating relationships among the living. In the context of this discussion, it is important to note that the moment when the enga are handed over establishes the distinction between the "masters of the work" and the rest. I pointed out earlier the divisiveness of this distinction, which is forced on the living by the work they perform for the dead. Through this distinction the "masters of the work" constitute themselves as the 'kind' of people who will be buried in one tomb and will join one raza, and contrast themselves with the people who will be excluded from that tomb and raza. By paying enga participants in the ritual differentiate themselves from the "masters of the work"

who contributed instead to the cotisacion. The people who pay enga are further distinguished by the fact that the enga in kind are customarily paid by the "masters of the work's" in-laws ("sons-in-law", vinanto and "fathers-in-law", rafoza). For the living, the handing over of enga in kind marks a moment of great divisiveness and tension, for it expresses in acute, even aggressive form the (contextual) hierarchy discussed in chapter 3 above.

The aggressiveness, divisiveness and relations of hierarchy that are experienced by the living are at the same time concealed from the sight of the dead. The enga in kind, which for the living are the most divisive kind of offering, are those the dead who are being brought back to life most enjoy, for the mock bull-fights enacted for the enga in kind are the first act in the spectacle of life that the dead are there to receive. The divisiveness experienced by the living is transformed into a loud and irresistible occasion to sing, dance and to parade in front of the crosses a crowd of 'unkinded', undifferentiated people which includes even the "masters of the work". Thus, while the living experience differentiation and 'kindedness' because of the dead, it is to fulfill the dead's desire to be brought back to the undifferentiation of life that the divisiveness that the dead and the raza momentarily impose on life must be concealed from their sight.

While the enga are being handed over, the women begin to cook large quantities of rice and meat. Although the

"masters of the work" achieve fame through lavish consumption, the success of the occasion is shared by all the participants through their contribution of enga; the sharing of the food neutralizes the distinction between the "masters" and the rest. By the time the food has been distributed the paying of the enga is over. The distinctions among the living are no longer visible; standing erect in the middle of the crowd, the living-dead-as-crosses are able to enjoy the sight of what they imagine to be an undifferentiated, undivided, immense crowd of descendants. It is this view over the living's filongoa (see above, ch.5) that they miss from inside their tomb and raza.

Each night, between the day when the crosses are moulded and the day they leave the village, wakes are held at the place where the crosses are kept. Except for the last night, only the "masters of the work" are expected to attend; friends, neighbours and good singers are welcome to join, but no formal invitation is issued. The first days, people gather for the wake and pretend very hard that they are "enduring the absence of sleep" (miaritory; see above, ch.7). They sing a few songs, but the crowd soon falls silent; most people eventually tiptoe back home, leaving only a few to stay sleeping outdoors. Activities pick up, however, as the final wake approaches. The night before the last is usually a true wake, including the customary singing and a fairly generous

distribution of rum. Finally, the last wake is a major social event involving a considerable crowd, far exceeding any funeral gathering. People coming to the wake have high expectations, for it is understood that the "masters of the work" are responsible for providing a good night's entertainment, typically by distributing large quantities of rum and by renting a baffle, a huge tape-recorder fully equipped with screeching loudspeakers and a limited number of tapes.

Within the general context of the ritual, the cross wakes appear to be a replica of funeral wakes. Despite this similarity, which people freely recognize, the two events also differ fundamentally. Early in my fieldwork, I was warned never to take a recording of the singing at funerals but to wait to do so at the cross ritual, for whereas people at funerals are sad (malahelo) and it would therefore be improper (tsy mety) to record their voices and cries, people at the cross wakes are happy (falifaly) and thus it does not matter (tsy mafahy) if one records their songs. Despite this, however, and despite the presence of the baffle at the cross wake, I was reassured that "people's singing doesn't change, it's just the same" (fihiran' olo tsy miova, fa mitovy avao) at the two types of wake.

The implication of these explanations, that the cross wake transforms the funerary wake into its opposite, a sad occasion into a happy one, is not in fact entirely accurate. On the one hand, as we have seen, not all

funerals are sad occasions. During the funerary wake for Dadikoroko (the old woman whose funeral moved people to happiness; see above, ch.7), for example, I asked whether I could record the singing, clapping and yelling that accompanied the dances; after some thought, it was agreed that I could do so because the crowd was happy. On the other hand, not all cross wakes are happy events. In the same way that sadness and happiness during a funeral depend on the dead person's status, the mood that prevails during a cross wake depends on the status of the cross. This status is always intrinsically ambiguous.

At one level, the status of the cross is that of the dead person that the cross represents and personifies. At a more abstract level, the status of the cross derives from which of the cross's two images, of a live ancestor and of a corpse, the organizers and participants of the ritual wish or are asked to emphasize during the ritual itself. In order to understand how the choice between the two images is formulated, we must return to the final wake's entertainment and to the baffle.

During the months leading up to the cross ritual, my adoptive family held endless meetings to discuss, and often to argue about, the renting of the baffle. I soon grew tired of listening to the discussions; besides dreading the screech of the loudspeakers, I did not think that a night of Malagasy pop music at full blast could be regarded as a feature of note of the cross ritual. Of

course, it later occurred to me that if so many meetings were being held to discuss the issue of the baffle there must have been something interesting about it. The renting of the baffle was highly controversial. Some people were opposed because they thought that it was too expensive, but this argument was curtly dismissed as a manifestation of stinginess. However, one woman's objections were rather more interesting. As the mother of the only child buried in the family tomb, she voiced the opinion that it was improper to have music and dancing when one of the crosses was that of a small child (aja mbo kelikely); since remembering her child made her sad (malahelo), she wanted people to sing hymns rather than dance during the wake. This objection was clearly taken more seriously than the fact that the baffle would be too expensive, and supporters of the baffle had to resort to the argument that a wake without music was in danger of being deserted. In the end, the family decided to rent the baffle, one of the brothers managed to get a bargain price for it, the crowd was large and the wake loud and successful.

On another occasion a similar argument to that of the child's mother met more understanding, possibly because four out of six crosses were for small children, and the wake was held without any music. As a result, the participants complained loudly of boredom and lack of rum; but although the crowd was listless, the singing lasted the whole night. The reasons for holding such a quiet wake were similar to those adduced by the woman in my first

example. On this occasion, the organizers chose to emphasize the second image of the cross representing the children's corpse, and participants in the cross wake were accordingly asked to perform a de facto funerary wake.

Yet this is only one side of the story, for the other image of the cross, that of a live ancestor, was allowed to take shape in a second, 'alternative' wake held alongside the 'official' one I just described. The protagonist of this alternative wake was a cross representing an old woman. Her name inscribed on the cross was Nentiko, but throughout the ritual she was called Be-nono (big breasts), for the cross was adorned with two concrete breasts, the size of the halved coconut shell with which they had been shaped, with the areola carefully painted black and the nipples red.

The final wake was to be held on Friday, and the formal invitation to it was sent out late on Thursday afternoon. Since it was rumoured that the Friday wake would be a quiet affair, with no music and dancing, some friends suggested that if I wanted to see a 'ripe' wake I should go to the Thursday wake and avoid the one on Friday. That Thursday night far more people than is customary for a penultimate wake gathered at the house where the crosses were. They had come to have fun with Be-nono.

Since it was only the eve of the final wake, there was no Petromax lamp lighting the yard; people gathered in the darkness and appeared to be restless as they waited for something to happen. Eventually some women began to sing

church hymns, and this seemed to break the ice. Groups of young men began to dance gañaky among themselves (see above, ch.7), but as soon as some women began dancing minotsoky, broke off to join them. Some of the refrains (antsa) that accompanied the dances were invented for the occasion and were dedicated to Be-nono, the most popular one being: "Be-nono, your breast doesn't move onto me" (Be-nono, nono iñy tsy afalo amiko).

Although the crosses were still in a corner of the yard and would be moved to a more central position only the following day, that Thursday night people found them already standing. This fact is very significant. I suggested above that crosses lying flat on the sand represent the dead corpses, whereas by raising them the dead person is brought back to life; consequently, had Be-nono still been lying on the sand on the eve of the final wake, she would have missed the dances and singing in her honour. By raising the crosses a day earlier, furthermore, the organizers divided the wake (if not the entire ritual) into two separate events, one centred on Be-nono and the other centred on the children's crosses. On this occasion, the paradox of the cross's imagery was formally and explicitly represented by confining the two contrasting images, that of a live ancestor and that of a corpse, to two separate wakes. In what follows, I shall use this extreme (and hence enlightening) example to investigate how and to what effect the cross is turned into a live ancestor. The key to the understanding of this process,

and ultimately of the entire ritual are, as we shall see, the breasts stuck onto the middle of Nentiko's cross.

A few days after the ritual was concluded, I asked the hazomanga and his wife who had organized it what the "meaning" (ino dikany?) of the breasts on Nentiko's cross was. They answered that the breasts were a "joke" (kisaky). Nentiko was a "great grandparent" (dady-be) who had "brought up many people" (namelo olo maro ie); she had had many children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. When I asked whether Nentiko had actually had big breasts, they laughed and told me that that was besides the point.

Be-nono's breasts were an unusual adornment for a cross. When people in my family first heard about it, they told me that they had never seen anything like it. During the ensuing conversation, however, they suggested that the breasts resembled the erotic sculptures (sary pornò) that in the past had adorned the corners of wood fences at the tombs, which had also represented big-breasted women. As far as these sculptures were concerned, however, none of my informants showed much interest: they were a "custom of past people" (fomban'olo taloha), they were no longer made, and that was it. Sometimes, however, someone might tentatively suggest that such sculptures were meant to be a souvenir (souvenira, fahatiarova) for the dead. Whether this idea applies to the erotic sculptures of the past or not,²⁵ it is nonetheless revealing when applied to the 'joke' of Be-nono's breasts.

Since we know that "the dead long for the living", the idea of offering them a souvenir of life is not surprising. I argued above, that during the asa lolo the living respond to this longing by bringing life into the cemetery. In the course of the cross ritual, in a different spatial context and through different ritual devices, the living similarly stage for the dead a spectacle of the life they have lost but still long for. Compared with the asa lolo, however, the dead find the spectacle more enjoyable, for instead of hearing the display of life from inside their tomb they are brought back to life right inside the village.

From Nentiko's point of view, the concrete breasts stuck on her cross are a souvenir of this spectacle that she can carry back to her tomb.²⁶ From the point of view of the living, however, the concrete breasts were a 'joke'. Like the pop music customarily provided by the organizers of the wake, Be-nono's breasts gave impulse to the dances, clapping and inebriation; the breasts moved the participants of the wake to demonstrate their liveliness. But after a long, wild night of amusement, Nentiko's cross was taken out of the village and away from life, Nentiko was carried to the cemetery and back into her fence. After opening a window on life in the village, that window was shut. The spectacle of life reverted to a funeral in which Nentiko -- concrete breasts notwithstanding -- was proved once more to be dead. This was the 'joke' played on her by the living.

Carrying Be-nono to the cemetery was the most frenzied part of the ritual. I explained above how the wake on the final night had been very quiet and boring, entirely devoted to the crosses of small children. At about two o'clock in the morning, however, it was rumoured that Be-nono might be taken away to the sand hills just west of the village so as to have some 'ripe' celebration. Although this expedition was forbidden by the hazomanga, who feared that people might get too excited and drunk and that "big trouble" (istoara bevata) might ensue in the dark, he granted that Be-nono be carried to the sand hills at dawn.

At the break of dawn Be-nono was taken away. She left the courtyard heading westwards in the opposite direction to that of the cemetery. A smallish crowd accompanied her, mainly young men, children and a few women, said to be in a joking relation (ampiziva) with the "masters of the work", hence with Nentiko too; among people linked by this relationship everything is allowed and everything must be endured. Be-nono's procession was frenzied from the start, and became increasingly so each time the men carrying the cross on a run stopped and stuck Be-nono in the sand: with the crowd pressing around them, they danced minotsoky with her, rubbing themselves against her and tweaking her nipples.

When Be-nono reached the top of the hill, the crowd stopped. The dancing went on, but something was clearly missing. The crowd had kidnapped Be-nono and was waiting

for ransom in the form of rum. Eventually, one of the hazomanga's younger brothers came with a group of relatives to rescue the cross and the crowd. He came balancing a bottle of rum on his head in triumph. The first nip of rum was poured over the cross's breasts; everyone else then had a share. Be-nono could then return to the village and start her long and tortuous journey to the cemetery accompanied by a far larger crowd.²⁷

If one allows for the difference between a cross and a coffin, Be-nono's second procession to the tombs was identical to that of Dadikoroko's corpse (see above, ch.7).²⁸ Be-nono's journey progressed as a series of spurts and sharp jolts; each stop was the pretext for more rum and for a new round of erotic dances and performances. As the cross moved on, the carriers battled for Be-nono, pushing and pulling for leverage and a hold.

Those people who had carried the children's crosses in quiet, straight and uninterrupted procession to the tombs had to wait for a long time before Be-nono finally arrived. After a few final stops at the edge of the cemetery, Be-nono moved close to her fence and in a last, frantic run was delivered to her tomb. The young men who took her inside the fence to stick her upright in the sand gave her a final go of minotsoky and some more rum. The hazomanga then asked them to leave. The usual thanksgiving speech praised the crowd because no fights or accidents had occurred and exhorted it to return home peacefully and quietly. The ritual was declared over. As the living

headed back home, Be-nono and the other crosses were left behind inside their fence.

Nentiko was thought to have enjoyed the feast and to be happy as a result; the living had visibly enjoyed it too. We can now see that the force of this ritual lies in the fact that it draws together the dead and the living, pleasing the former without forcing the latter to feel the fear and horror raised by the asa lolo. Indeed, the cross ritual makes the ancestors even happier, because it brings them back to the village where they can dance with the living; the living in turn are less fearful, because they dance in the village with concrete crosses rather than at the tombs over the bodies of the dead.²⁹

The dead are so involved in the celebration that they direct the living people's performance, their dancing, running and singing. In response to my admiration for the crowd's behaviour, I would be told that the dead person whose cross was being carried had liked to dance and drink and that s/he was very good at both. I mentioned in chapter 7 that Dadikoroko also had been a very good dancer in her lifetime and that she had been a "great devil". When her cross left the courtyard on its journey towards the cemetery, people found it almost impossible to carry. Because of its unusually large size, the cross had been tied to a wooden stretcher to allow more people to carry it, but the poles kept breaking and the ropes coming loose. Large amounts of medicine (fanintsina) were

sprinkled on the crowd and cross. Yet even after the stretcher had been repaired the procession did not increase its pace, obstinately making detours, pushing and tugging the stretcher, and stopping for more rum. I was told with great satisfaction that all these delays went to prove what a "great devil" Dadikoroko had been and still was (devoly be ie).

If the ancestors are able both to affect and to enjoy the dancing, drinking and delivery of their cross to the cemetery, it remains to be explained how the living manage to play their 'joke' on the dead, bringing their spectacle of life to an end by fencing the crosses inside the tomb and abandoning the dead in the cemetery. To explain this, we must return to the dual image of the cross and to the presence within the same ritual of crosses that project different images.

I have argued above that the cross projects two images, that of a corpse and that of an ancestor brought back to life. The image and the feeling of life take shape when the cross is raised up and people see the person the cross represents. The image of the corpse is established instead by means of the ritual's structure, which follows step by step the structure of a funeral; right from the start, when the crosses first appear in the village and people around them begin to "endure the absence of sleep", the crosses are treated as substitutes of dead bodies.

In the example I just recalled, these two images were separated into two distinct events. Despite this

separation, the two events reacted on each other. On the one hand, the devices whereby Be-nono was endowed with life also established, by contrast, the image of death which upheld the performance of her and of the other crosses' mock funeral; as noted earlier, people must first be able to imagine that a concrete cross is a live person before they can be moved to perform a mock funeral for it. On the other hand, the presence of the children's crosses and the special emphasis on their representation of corpses forced Be-nono to her final destination in the tomb. Be-nono could enjoy such an extreme degree of vitality, because the representation of death through the children's crosses ensured that Nentiko be brought back to life as Be-nono in the context of a funeral, thus ultimately ensuring that Be-nono be delivered to Nentiko's tomb and her life be brought to an end. Although there exists no doubt in people's mind that a cross's only destination is inside the tomb, the cross ritual plays on the possibility of bringing the ancestors back to the village and to life, and at the same time establishes a device for sending, or returning, ancestors and their crosses to where they belong.

While the image of the cross as a mock corpse and the overall structure of the ritual are important features for prescribing the crosses' final destination, one should also bear in mind that the procession leading Be-nono (or the cross of any old person such as Dadikoroko) to the cemetery was strikingly similar to the funerary procession

for old people. I suggested this similarity above, but I wish to add a few comments.

Although it is undoubtedly more comfortable, both physically and emotionally, for the living to carry a piece of concrete than a decomposing corpse, the ancestor whose cross is carried in triumph years after her death passes through a very similar experience to that which she had when she left the village for the cemetery the first time. As I argued in chapter 7, the joyful funeral held for old people is meant to celebrate their life, rather than their death; the living celebrate the fact that the dead person has lived long enough to see a great growth in the number of descendants, generation after generation. In the course of the cross ritual, these ancestors -- the old people -- are offered a new, updated vision of the life they left behind when they died, a life that has increased and multiplied since their death. In order to please these ancestors, as many people as possible must attend the wake and participate actively in the procession; it is often pointed out that far more people attend the cross ritual than the funeral. The great, wild crowd surrounding Nentiko's and Dadikoroko's crosses proved that both of them had been and are still "great grandparents", who gave life to many descendants whose number keeps expanding. It thus becomes clear why the crosses of dead children are carried so fast, with little fuss and excitement, straight to their tomb. If the cross ritual concerns remembering

and joking, children have seen too little to have anything to remember, and so there is little to justify the joke.

The analysis of the cross ritual has shown how the ancestors are offered an opportunity to remember and to enjoy life, and how they inevitably get pushed back and left, lifeless, in their tombs at the cemetery. The cross ritual has the same plot as the asa lolo, except that the spatial opposition within which the plot unfolds is inverted. In the asa lolo, the living bring the village into the cemetery, and then leave taking life back with them; the ancestors are spectators who can play only a limited role as active participants, for at most, they hear the stamping of feet above their dead bodies. In the cross ritual, the ancestors return to the village, stand upright, dance, drink, run, and feel pleasure; they take over the living so they can do what they used to like as living people. Both rituals respond to the longing that the dead feel for life, but in doing so they act out a contrast between life and death, between the living and the ancestors, between the village and the cemetery. Both rituals provide the same solution, that the two worlds that are brought together for a while ultimately be kept separate. The solution, however, is not conclusive. The longing of the dead for life is never fully and permanently appeased; it could be so only if the rituals, instead of a 'joke', actually gave life back to the dead. It is the dead's lifelessness and separation established

by the ritual which constantly draws the dead back to the living.

Chapter 8. Notes

1. As people in Betania remarked, very few such sculptures are left due to European thefts. See also below and n.25.
2. As will become clear from my subsequent discussion, these crosses are not meant to convey Christian symbolism.
3. Although concrete seems to have become readily available and accessible to the Vezo quite recently (since the early sixties), my informants were remarkably uninterested in my attempts at reconstructing earlier customs, seemingly because they saw no significant break between the past and the present. People simply learned to use this new medium, concrete, which became available thanks to the Europeans and which allowed Vezo to achieve more successfully what they had always aspired to do, that is to build permanent, lasting tombs for the dead. Thus, concrete is a "good thing" (raha soa) because it lasts a long time (maharitsy); it is used because it lasts longer than wood. Older people would often point to a small baby -- a grandchild or great-grandchild -- and explain that thanks to the use of concrete, when the child was grown up and they were long dead, she would still be able to see her grandparents' tomb. The durability of concrete also seems significant in the context of the importance attached by the Sakalava monarchy to the durability of its own tombs (see Bare 1977; Lombard 1973; Lavondès 1967; Feeley-Harnik 1978; Bloch 1981). However, in view of Vezo attitudes towards the royal past (see above, ch.3), it is not surprising that I was not able to gather any information about this issue.
4. On the 'meaning' of work/asa see Feeley-Harnik 1984, 1986.
5. The Malagasy language has two possessive suffixes for the plural possessive adjective 'our', one inclusive (-ntsika) and one exclusive (-nay). If the term asantsika is used, the people addressed are included in the responsibility of organizing and performing the ritual; if the term asanay is used, they are excluded. See below on the notion of "masters of the work".

6. When the hazomanga talks to the ancestors, he refers to the fence (yala) as the ancestors's house.

7. Women may not know which tomb they will join at death (see above, ch.6). A married woman must participate in the work her husband organizes for his raza, even if she will not be buried in her husband's tomb; however, she will probably state that she is not a "master of the work" but just a person related to the "masters" by marriage (olo mpanambaly). On the other hand, she will act as a "master of the work" if the work is organized by her father or a brother.

8. See n.5.

9. For the significance of fences among the Sakalava see Feeley-Harnik 1980. See also Lavondès 1976:69 n.3 for an example of the divisiveness of fences among the living.

10. This applies especially to the cross ritual.

11. The money was spent as follows: concrete 52.870FMG; metal rods 19.000FMG; paint 7.750FMG; bricks 50.000FMG; rum 230.000FMG; rice 140.000FMG; 1 head of cattle 135.000FMG; meat bought at the market 30.000FMG; tsaka, tomatoes, and onions 3.000FMG; renting of the baffle (tape-recorder and speakers; see below) 40.000FMG.

12. Nine adults, two young nubile women (somonjara) and myself contributed to the cotisacion; two young unmarried men (kidabo) and one young nubile woman who were expected to contribute failed to do so. Contributions recorded in the notebook varied between 5.000 and 80.000FMG; additional, unrecorded contributions would be made by everyone in equal shares in short-term cotisacions throughout the various stages of the rituals.

13. According to the astrological calendar it is taboo (faly) to perform any ritual during the month of November. In one instance the asa lolo was performed in December, and many people regarded this as unusual and rather improper (tsy mety).

14. See above, ch.2 n.12.

15. When the hazomanga bought a new canoe in this period his siblings insinuated that he had paid for it with money from the communal fund; in fact half of the money was his own and I had lent him the other half. To dispel these rumours, the hazomanga called a family meeting on some excuse and showed that the money collected for the ritual had not been touched.

16. See Parry and Bloch 1989; above, ch.2 n.31.

17. Great emphasis is placed on the fact that the dead should not be surprised. As we saw earlier (above, ch. 2), being surprised is the common experience of the living Vezo as they "keep themselves alive" in Vezo fashion. The lack of surprise in the realm of the dead appears to be another element of distinction between life and death.

18. "Faly tokoa rozy nandray an'io, nahazo an'io raha io, io raha electrophone hañañam-bazaha ro natoro[-]jareo aze, ka faly, ravo reo, ka izay ro añañbara anao, iha raza-be matoe, tsy hotseriky nareo noho la aña hoe-he: 'laha zafiko reo, anake reo nahazo raha, ka la tsy misy ty fahatarovan-dreo ahiko'. Oho, tsy misy amin'zay, ka izay ro ikaihañañareo añañbarañañareo io" [Evarista, Betania].

19. Adults teach babies how to do minotsoky (a child often learns how to perform this dance before learning to walk) and incite children to dance hard, by sticking out their buttocks, holding their arms up, lowering their bottoms by bending their knees and slowly straightening them again.

20. See Bloch 1971, 1982.

21. Although only one cross is customarily "begged" for, if it is "given" the rest follow.

22. The diviner indicates favourable days for the first operation (the moulding of the crosses) and for the ritual's concluding act when the crosses are carried to the cemetery. Within this period, all other operations are undertaken on grounds of convenience.

23. Since the woman was buried in her husband's tomb, her father and siblings were unable to build the cross for her and had to wait for her husband to take the initiative in doing so.

24. Whereas a small heifer can cost as much as 100.000FMG, a case of beer costs less than 30.000FMG.

25. On the funerary sculptures see Lombard 1973 and Pourcet 1986.

26. The breasts on Nentiko's cross were not only an erotic attribute. Although they became so for the participants during some of the ritual (during the procession to the cemetery in particular), we saw that the breasts signalled that Nentiko was a 'great-grandmother'.

27. The fact that Be-nono was initially kidnapped by the ampiziya of the "masters of the work" is only of limited significance. First of all, the people who kidnapped Be-nono were said to be in a 'joking relation' with the "masters of the work", but not all of them were 'technically' so. Moreover, their identity as ampiziya was not made explicit during the ritual. I was only told that

they were in a joking relation with the hazomanga and with Nentiko when the hazomanga explained why he had agreed to let Be-nono go to the sand hills: he couldn't refuse because the people asking for the cross were his ampiziva. Having obtained Be-nono, the ampiziva initiated the display of vitality staged for Nentiko; however, once excitement and frenziness were triggered off, more and more people joined in until, as we shall see below, Nentiko herself took over the living to have them do what she used to like when she was alive.

28. Even more significantly, the procession with Dadikoro's corpse and that with Dadikoroko's cross were identical.

29. People were horrified by my descriptions of a Merina famadihana I witnessed in Antananarivo, a ritual during which people dance with the corpses of their ancestors (see Bloch 1971, 1982). My friends reacted characteristically, stating that Merina practices are 'difficult' whereas those of the Vezo are 'easy' (see above, ch.3), but they did not explicitly admit to the similarities between famadihana and the Vezo cross ritual.

CONCLUSION

THE SHADOWS OF LIFE AND DEATH

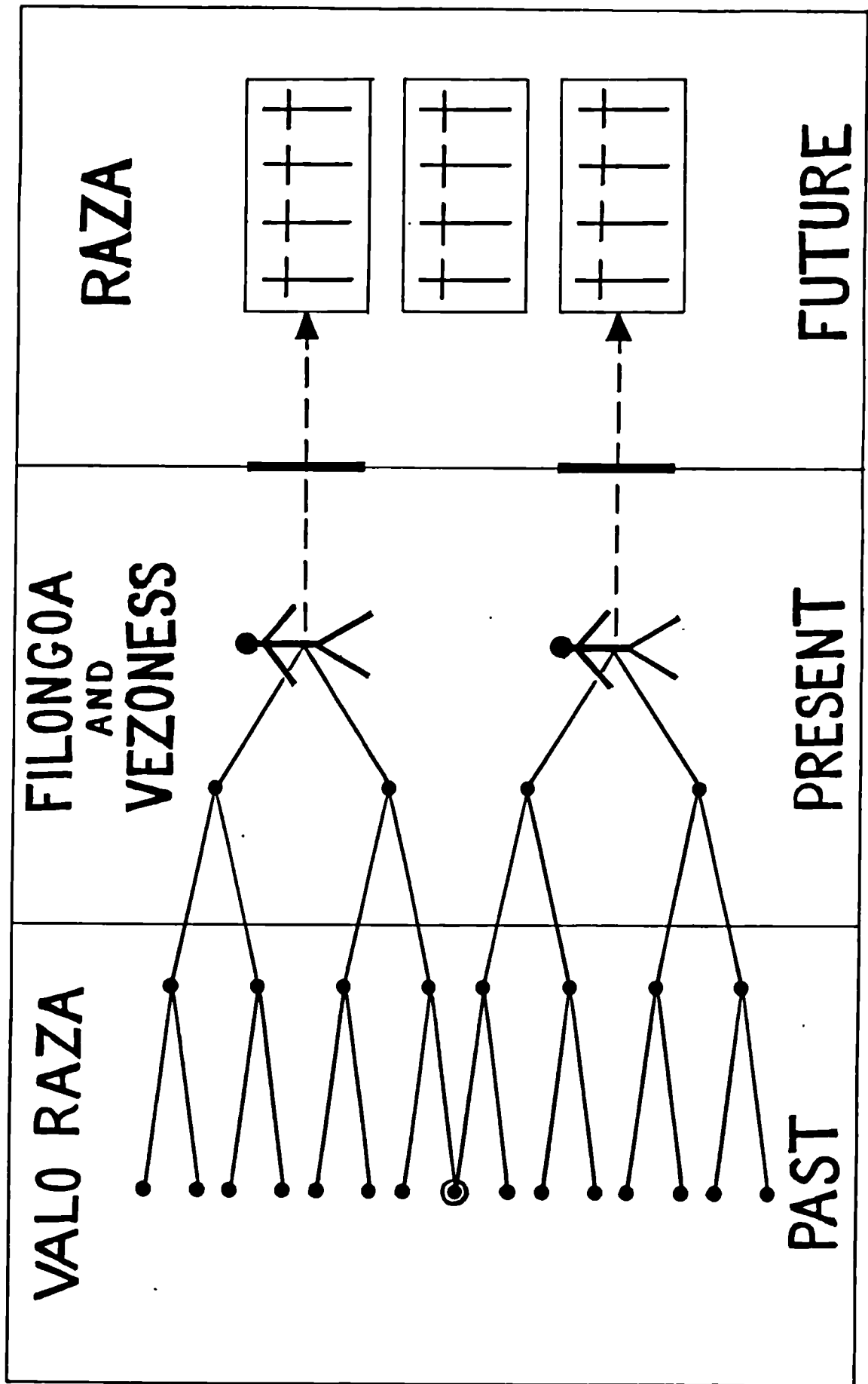
The barrier that the living create between themselves and the "people of the past who are dead" (olo taloha fa nimaty) divides two different types of existence. On one side of the barrier there is Vezoness and the people rendered Vezo by it: these people are not a "kind of people" (Vezo tsy karazan'olo). Living Vezo are 'unkinded' not only because they learn to be what they are and shape themselves contingently through practice (see above, chs.1-4); they are 'unkinded' also because they share undifferentiated links of relatedness (filongoa) that ignore specifications of 'kind' (see above, ch.5). On the other side of the barrier there are tombs with solid, concrete walls which house the raza, membership of which separates the dead into 'kinds'; each fence contains "one kind of people" (raza raiky) (see above, chs.6-8).

In the Introduction, I pointed to the contrast between what at first sight appear to be two incompatible components of Vezo personhood, 'unkindedness' and 'kindness'. In the course of this dissertation, I have analyzed these two components in turn -- Vezoness and

filongoa on the one hand, the raza on the other -- and have shown that rather than constituting the Vezo person, the two constitute opposite domains and kinds of experience: the first being the experience of the living, the second the experience of the dead. Viewed over time, the distinction between the unkindness of the living and the kindness of the dead is equivalent to a distinction between the present and the future (see Fig.5). We saw in chapter 6 that the raza only concerns people as bones-to-be; in other words, the raza is not situated in the past from where the living descend and receive their life and identity, but is situated in the future, it is living people's future destination as corpses into tombs.

The Vezo are not without a past; but their past, like their present, is not constituted by "kinds of people". When the living look back at the past they see the "eight raza of living people" (olom-belo valo raza). Although the past is constituted by raza because the living were generated by "people of the past who are dead" (ancestors who first generated the present, then died and are now bones), the past remains 'unkind' because the raza that generated each person is not one (as will be the raza that receives the person's bones) but many, eight or more if they can be remembered. The Vezo do not discriminate between their multiple sources of generation when, in the present and as living people, they trace links of filongoa among themselves through an ungendered vision stretching back over past generations (see above, ch.5).

FIG.5- TIME IN VEZO KINSHIP



Although a barrier exists between incompatible principles of personhood (unkindness and kindness), kinds of experience (life and death), temporal dimensions (past-present and future) and kinds of space (cold village and hot cemetery), that barrier is not entirely impermeable, shadows from both sides seep through.

One of these shadows is that which the raza casts over the living in anticipation of their death (see above, ch.6). Thus, for a brief moment, the ritual of soro treats children as if they were bones, arranging and preparing their future destination as corpses in a tomb. The hazomanga, who mediates between the dead and those of the living who will join his raza at death, carries the shadow more permanently within himself; the hazomanga is closest to the barrier between the living and the dead, and if things were 'right' he would be the first to die and to pass through it.

The shadow of the raza over the living is the shadow of death. Death brings differentiation, which is absent (except under the shadow itself) from the experience of the living. Only when the dead are buried "with the father who did soro for them" (am-babany nisoro azy) do they join the divisiveness of the raza.

While differentiation into 'kinds' is unknown to the living, the latter experience one of another sort, differentiation by gender (see above, ch.5). Gender among the living and within the process of growth of filongoa is problematic, because men and women are different while

they should be the same given that links of generation through the two genders are identical. Filongoa remains ungendered because marriage blends motherhood and fatherhood into ungendered parenthood; simultaneously and paradoxically, however, marriage recognizes the difference between genders and between motherhs and fatherhs.

The shadow of gender and the shadow of death are not the same, but they are closely linked. This link appears most clearly in the ritual of soro, which selects what filongoa keeps undifferentiated. Since at death a child can be placed inside the tomb of only one of its two parents, one of its four grandparents, or one of its eight great-grandparents, the purpose of soro is to effect a choice of tomb and raza. This choice draws distinctions on the basis of gender by discriminating between motherhood and fatherhood, and it divides the dead into 'kinds'.

Nonetheless, the kindedness and genderdness of the dead and of the raza does not contradict, or weaken, the unkindedness and ungenderdness of living people's experience of filongoa and Vezoness. The shadow of the raza and the shadow of gender are cast upon the living in so far as the living imagine and construe the experience of the dead. The dead are 'kinded' because the living make them so; at the same time, it is through the kindedness of their dead that the Vezo express and experience their unkindedness as living people.

The other, opposite shadow we observed seeping through the barrier between undifferentiation and differentiation

is the shadow of life over death. This is the strong longing that the dead feel for life, as they experience the differentiation of death. To appease their longing, the dead demand to be brought back to life to look at their live descendants, to dance and have fun.

We can understand the dead's longing by looking at dadilahy, very old and tired, whose views I examined in chapter 5. Soon he will die, and when this happens his long and well-lived life will be celebrated with dances and 'ripe' feasts. When he dies, however, he will enter the raza, and so experience the divisiveness imposed by death. He will join one 'kind' of people and will be joined in the future by a mere fraction of the grandchildren who listen to his stories and find scraps of iron for his knives. At his great age, dadilahy enjoys the best view of undifferentiated filongoa, yet he is also closest to the differentiation of the raza. When he dies, his wide, 'unkinded' vision over life will come to an end. The walls of the tomb where he will be buried will reduce his vision to his raza.

Within their fences, dead people who lived a long life and produced more life in their turn are imagined to long for the wider, undifferentiated vision they experienced in life, a vision they can re-experience only temporarily through the rituals that their live descendants perform for them. Yet, although the rituals that the living perform for the dead meet the latter's desires, they also raise and reinforce the barrier between life and death,

coolness and heat, undifferentiation and differentiation. But in the act itself of raising the barrier, the rituals construe an image of death that negates any attempt to expell the dead and forget them: despite all live people's effort, the dead never forget them. Neither the longing of the dead for life nor the living's effort to keep the dead at a distance can ever come to an end.

The shadow that the raza casts over the living and the shadow that life casts over the dead show that a definitive separation between the two can never be wholly achieved. The ultimate reason for this is that the dead in their cemeteries and the living in their villages are the same people. Before joining the raza the dead generated life, learnt to be and became Vezo, were 'unkinded' and enjoyed the pleasing view of their many descendants like dadilahy. Like dadilahy, every living Vezo will traverse the barrier at death and begin in that moment to long to come back to life.

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