

Earth-Shakers of Sahafatra:

**authority, fertility, and the cult of nature
in southeast Madagascar**

Oliver Woolley

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Ph.D.
Department of Anthropology
London School of Economics and Political Science
University of London

1998

UMI Number: U615559

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI U615559

Published by ProQuest LLC 2014. Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.



ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

THESES

F

7564

699863

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the people and of the land of *Sahafatra* in southeast Madagascar. It describes and interprets the system of authority in operation in the region in order to explore local conceptions of the nature of 'rulers' and of the nature of 'ruling'. The thesis demonstrates that the authority used by 'rulers' to justify their positions stems from two different sources: straightforward patrilineal descent relations, enabling access to the blessing of the ancestors; and the ability to survive what are regarded as 'life-giving' ritual tests, allowing the channelling of fertility directly from the 'environment'.

Part I of the thesis introduces the people and the land and gradually develops the idea of a 'culture of testing' as an alternative to descent, showing that 'rulers' can rule over people who are not their biological progeny by passing through a demanding ceremonial procedure designed to prove their worthiness. Chapter 1 discusses the diverse origins and current social organisation of the people of *Sahafatra*; Chapter 2 describes the hierarchical authority system that they hold in common; Chapter 3 illustrates the connection between a leader's realm of authority and the selection procedure used to choose him; Chapter 4 describes and analyses the testing process that must be undergone to become a senior leader; Chapter 5 shows how by passing certain tests a ruler comes to be regarded as potent.

Part II of the thesis shows how the 'culture of testing' is not an abstract form but is predicated on the connection between man and the 'environment'. It explains how the intimate involvement of man and 'environment' allows the 'culture of testing' to serve a powerful practical purpose: generating life and fertility for the people. Chapter 6 explores how mythological tests of the past have coloured attitudes towards testing now; Chapter 7 analyses the relationship between man and the general 'environment' and describes how man uses this relationship to access the 'force of nature'; Chapter 8 discusses how people 'ground' themselves in the land through particular funerary and commemorative practices.

The Conclusion argues that although the two principles of authority, descent and the 'culture of testing', are in opposition to each other they can, and are, combined and mediated by the most senior leaders. The 'groundedness' of both principles and the inseparability of nature and society allow composite forms of power to be created out of apparently incompatible idioms.

List of contents

List of figures	vii
List of plates	viii
Note on dialect and transcription	ix
Note on orthography	xi
Acknowledgements	xii

Introduction	1
Setting the scene: discovery and first arrival	10
Fieldwork	
Living arrangements	
The rhythm of fieldwork: making friends and daily life	
Special events and journeys	
Changing perspectives on fieldwork	
The place: area and concentration of study	21
The Big City	
Size isn't everything	
History	
A guided tour of <i>Vondrozo</i> -ville	
Amenities: water, electricity, toilets	
The wider picture: communications	
An introduction to the land	
A view from on high	
Homesteading	

Part I: a culture of testing 38

Chapter 1. Defining the field of research: what is *Sahafatra*? 39

Literature	
The people of <i>Sahafatra</i>	
Evolution of the term <i>Sahafatra</i>	
Political entity or environmental label: the confusion between land and people	
The French colonial interpretation	
<i>Sahafatra</i> as a corporate group	
The Clans	
Differences and similarities between clans	
What is <i>Sahafatra</i> really: a way of life and a way of looking at the world	
The story (so far)	

Chapter 2. The authority system of *Sahafatra* 64

Households and household design	
Structure of the Household	
Sons: the <i>Bekomafa</i> Boys	
Daughters and movement	
Spatial orientation of the household	
Layout and structure of the village: the development cycle	
Homesteading and the ideal of imagined growth	

The reality of the village
 The make-up and membership of Big-Houses
 Similarity and difference between a Household and a Big-House
 Leadership and nature of the Big-House
 The Fertile/Big-House conceptual divide
 The Big-House aspect
 The Fertile aspect
 The court of the senior *panjaka*
 The mass of subjects and the Eye of the Water
 Protector and substitute: the 'wife of misfortune'
 The Royal Woman and the Taster
 Families of Big-Houses
 Leaders of Families of Big-Houses
 The most senior in the land
 Continuities and breakages in the multi-level authority system
 The structure of authority of the *Masitafika*, a clan of the people of *Sahafatra*
 What are *panjaka* and how do they fit into the structure?

Chapter 3. The responsibilities and 'selection' of the leaders 102

Competing idioms of power in *Sahafatra*
 Realms of authority: how Fathers generate a domain to rule over
 Duties and responsibilities of the Father
 Minders of the One House
 Providing a communal space and acting as a representative
 The reason for choice: how Minders are 'chosen'
 Criteria for choice and justification of the need to choose
 Earth-Shakers and their sphere of authority
 Jurisdiction over, and association with, the land
 Public roles and receiving strangers
 The need for active selection: choosing an Earth-Shaker
 The extreme case of the Old Woman
 A return to descent in place of choice
 The changing nature of power as one ascends the hierarchy

Chapter 4. Testing: the process of becoming a senior *panjaka* 123

Section 1: the process of testing 125

Qualities sought in an Earth-Shaker
 The importance of cattle
 The need to capture leaders
 Ritual activities: proving yourself worthy

The Black Wine ceremony 134

What is '*toa-mity*': the nature of the Black Wine ceremony
 The mechanics of the ritual
 The handing over of the hat

The 'raising-up' of the senior *panjaka* [*sandratra panjaka*] 142

Analysis of the role of the Sister's Son

Section 2: what makes a *panjaka* a *panjaka*? 150

Life careers and senior *panjaka* as targets
 The idiom of fatherhood: the *panjaka* as the 'Father of the People'
 Father-Son tension: another reason why senior *panjaka* are targets

Section 3: of *panjaka* and politicians - a reversal of fortunes 159

How ideas about 'testing' translate into wider political life

The disjunction between urban and rural conceptions of power
Politics of the people: infinite bounty v limited goods theory
Declarations of wealth
Authority, identity and responsibility

Chapter 5. The potency of the *panjaka* 170
Section 1: how *panjaka* are potent 171

The popular ‘myth’ of how people became *panjaka*
Age and potency
Maturation: from child to warrior to father
The connection between maturation, potency and conflict
Individual nature and the special potency of senior *panjaka*
Town-building as a demonstration of potency
From homestead to town: becoming a named place
Confusion about town-builders
The marriage of potency and privilege
The holy-mouths [*masim-bava*] of senior *panjaka*
Senior *panjaka* and debates [*kabaro*]
Rights to the agricultural labour of subjects

Section 2: the *Dina* 187

The nature and purpose of the organisation
The structure of the *Dina*
The enforcement of justice
Negotiation of the charter
How cattle thefts are dealt with by the *Dina*
Deciding the payment of damages
Official or unofficial?
The impotence of *panjaka*

Part II: the cult of nature 204

Chapter 6. The changing and pervasive nature of tests and trials 205

Tests that are already given when you enter the world
‘*Fanopa*’ relationships in practice
The nature of ‘*opa*’
What does a ‘cursing relationship’ [*fanopa*] do?
A tragic story of the death of a *panjaka*
‘Testers’ [*fanange*]: the modern day equivalent to ‘cursing partners’ [*pifanopa*]
The appeal of ‘testing relationships’ [*fanange*]
Learning to cope with ‘testing relationships’: socialisation
The nature of teasing
Tests as a cultural system

Chapter 7. Creation and the creation of fertility 224

How is it possible to create fertility: alternative sources of blessing
‘*Zanahary*’: creator or creation?
‘*Fanahy*’ and soul-loss
Human nature and ‘*Zanahary*’: the impossibility of denial of self
Invisible ‘*Zanahary*’: a system of elements
The implications: how people and ‘*Zanahary*’ are inseparable
The umbilical cord [*foitra*]: multi-plug and extension lead in one
Lifelines: rivers and umbilical cords [*foitra*]

The disposal of the umbilical cord	
The marriage of earth and water	
Farming: agricultural alchemy	
The trampling [<i>manosy</i>] of the rice paddy	
The ‘raising-up’ of the <i>panjaka</i> as human alchemy	
Why the Earth-Shakers are likened to, and are like, the land	
From ruling territory to being the land	
Shared properties of Earth-Shakers and the earth	
How the subjects are likened to, and are like, the water	
Re-analysis of the ritual ‘raising-up’ of the <i>panjaka</i> : the main plot	
The dynamics of human alchemy	
The flow of force	
The subplots	
The marriage of the main plot and the subplots in the house	
Chapter 8. Funerary and commemorative practices	258
After the death of a <i>panjaka</i>	
Section 1: the death and burial of <i>panjaka</i>	259
Posthumous promotion: ruling when dead	
General procedure for burial of senior <i>panjaka</i>	
The laying-out of the body	
Debt [<i>trosa</i>] at the death of a <i>panjaka</i>	
The importance of debt	
The final burial: ‘throwing away the animal’	
The journey to the tomb	
Tombs	
The ‘sitting-up’ and the ‘crying over the mat’	
Section 2: ‘<i>andry-faty</i>’ and standing stones	271
The formation of dynasties	
Understanding standing stones	
The grammar of remembrance	
Competition in the realm of death	
The ‘ <i>andry-faty</i> ’ at <i>Vohiljatsy</i> (clan <i>Vohilakatra</i>)	
The event: Thursday evening/night	
The funeral aspect	
Boxing and the first feast	
The professional entertainers	
The rapaciousness of the troupe	
The purpose of funerary and commemorative practices	
Conclusion	286
Nature and Society	
A monistic world-view made-up of complex ‘natures’	
Dualistic tendencies: dual sources of fertility and authority	
The first tier of authority: mastery of human affairs	
The nature of ruling: a synthesis of two different types of authority	
Comparing the <i>Zafimaniry</i> and the <i>Sahafatra</i>	
Houses, tombs and standing stones	
Divine leaders	
Bibliography	308

List of figures and cartoons

Figure 1:	The peoples of Madagascar.	0
Figure 2:	Regional geography - rivers, peoples and towns.	9a
Figure 3:	Clan territories and administrative centres of <i>Sahafatra</i> .	46a
Figure 4:	Structure of the <i>Masitafika</i> clan.	97a
Cartoon 1:	Politicians give away and demonstrate wealth.	162a
Cartoon 2:	Unscrupulous politicians handle the public.	162b
Cartoon 3:	Politicians taking voters for fools.	162c

List of plates

1. A <i>panjaka</i> of the past.	6a
2. The loneliness of an isolated homestead and the hustle and bustle of town.	34a
3. The contrast between the empty landscape and a ceremonial village.	55a
4. The <i>Bekomafa</i> Boys at home.	68a
5. From homestead to complete village.	75a
6. From the framework of a Big-House/Fertile to an actual house of sacrifice.	82a
7. Cattle trample the fields and are sacrificed.	127a
8. ‘ <i>Panjaka</i> ’ and Royal Woman at Black Wine Ceremony surrounded by subjects.	138a
9. The <i>Masitafika</i> Chief of the Warriors entertains.	173a
10. ‘ <i>Panabaka</i> ’ leading a procession of girls; collected ‘ <i>panjaka</i> ’ at a debate.	175a
11. Standing stones to a great chieftain of the past; harvesting <i>panjaka</i> ’s fields.	185a
12. Party to celebrate the unveiling of a commemorative stone to the <i>Dina</i> .	187a
13. Rice paddies in the countryside; rice granary in a village.	226a
14. The ‘raising-up’ of the Earth-Shaker and the land that he makes fertile.	241a
15. Trampling a rice paddy; column of men arriving at a ‘raising-up’ ceremony.	248a
16. Women pound rice at the ‘ <i>andry-faty</i> ’; the boxing competition at dawn.	277a
17. Standing stones at dawn; ‘ <i>panao siry</i> ’ perform at the ‘ <i>andry-faty</i> ’.	280a

Note on dialect and transcription

The people of Madagascar all essentially speak one basic language; Malagasy. However this language is by no means standardised throughout the island and many dialects are spoken. Verin calls Malagasy a “linguistic ensemble” displaying significant variations [Verin 1975:167].

Closely related to the Maayan language of Borneo, Malagasy speech has been shaped over the course of a more than a millennium through contact with other Indonesian and (probably) South Asian cultures, and through engagement with Bantu, Arabic and European influences. Over this period the language of the island itself has refracted into three broad bands: the *Merina-Betsileo* centre, the east and north coasts, and the west and south [Allen 1995:121].

The people living in the area under study, the land of *Sahafatra* in SE Madagascar, think of themselves as speaking a dialect distinct to that found anywhere else on the island. Living as they do at the geographical and cultural cross-roads of the three language ‘bands’ they incorporate elements of all of them, although the east coast influence is most strongly felt.

For political as much as linguistic reasons the people of *Sahafatra* particularly contrast their own local way of speaking [*fiteny-paritra Sahafatra*] with the official, standard Malagasy, close to that of the highland *Merina* people, which is used as the language of bureaucracy and as a nation-wide lingua-franca.

There is no written grammar or vocabulary of the *Sahafatra* dialect and the area in which it is spoken has no clearly defined boundaries. In addition, within the territory of *Sahafatra* itself, there are slight dialectical differences between clans, each clan favouring a particular vocabulary, a particular pronunciation and a certain set of greetings. However, despite the hazy area of use and the local variations, the *Sahafatra* dialect is undeniably felt to have a unity; this is displayed by the way people speak as much as by the actual words they use.

The people of *Sahafatra* have far deeper, more straightforward, tonally dampened voices than the high-pitched sing-song lilt of the highlanders. The people themselves are aware of this and proud of it. The fussy, flowery language of the highlanders is associated with manipulation and deception; people speaking this type of language are not to be trusted. On several occasions I was witness to the accent of highlanders being cruelly mimicked the moment they set foot out of the door.

In contrast the people of *Sahafatra* take pride in their simplicity and directness. This is not to say that there is no subtlety in their language; like many Malagasy peoples they love proverbs, evocative imagery and word play. However these devices are used with a purpose not as a matter of course in everyday speech. Normally the greatest emphasis is put on telling the truth and plain speaking [*teny mazava*].

It should be remembered that for most people in the area their language was purely oral. The

majority of people in the countryside did not know how to read or write. People made a point of asking if I could read and write Malagasy as well as speak it, and were always impressed that I could. For them the art of speech and the act of writing are dramatically different skills.

Many young people did receive some schooling and could consequently read and write to some extent. Even so they tended not to know all the conventions of standard Malagasy and therefore simply wrote words according to how they sounded. In order to be as faithful as possible to informants original words I also write them as they sounded. I do this with the intention of recording and capturing the richness and difference of the dialect and accent as fully as possible.

However when I am recording how things ‘sounded’ I transcribe using a standard Malagasy orthography. I do this because there are no consistent local spelling conventions that I can follow. Needless to say I have some reservations about this approach as its ‘fussiness’ is not representative of *Sahafatra* speech. On balance though, the standard orthography allows me to remain true to the original sound at the same time as helping readers familiar with standard Malagasy understand the common roots of words etc

Note on orthography

The fact that the land of *Sahafatra* is situated at a cultural crossroads seems to have influenced the make-up of the language considerably. The *Sahafatra* dialect has much in common with other east coast dialects (notably the accent and vocabulary), the dialect of the *Bara* to their immediate west (where 'l' replaces the standard Malagasy 'd' in many words) and the highland dialect; it also incorporates extensive borrowing of French words (from colonial times) that have been Malgachicised. However, despite the mix of influences, the language can still be represented satisfactorily using standard Malagasy orthography, the basic conventions of which I outline below for those unfamiliar with the script:

- the alphabet is based on the Roman system introduced by British missionaries in the 19th C
- the 'o' is pronounced like a long 'u' as in the English word 'tube'
- the 'j' following an 'n' in the middle of a word is pronounced like a 'z'

For those familiar with standard Malagasy it might be helpful to outline some of the basic variations with the *Sahafatra* dialect. Obviously many words are completely different, or are the same but have a different meaning; nevertheless there remains a large body of words that are essentially the same but which are written or pronounced differently. With reference to these shared words the dialect tends to differ from standard Malagasy in the following ways:

- words are shortened by dropping 'na' at the end eg '*razana*' becomes '*raza*'
- sounds are simplified eg '*dia*' becomes '*da*'
- consonants are cut out eg '*aiza*' becomes '*aia*'; '*izaho*' becomes '*iaho*'
- the 'm' sound is often dropped eg *mpanjaka* becomes '*panjaka*'; '*sempotra*' - '*sepotra*'
- the letter 's' is pronounced as a 'sh' sound
- the 'v' sound is changed to a 'b' sound eg '*avo*' becomes '*abo*'
- the 'a' at the end of a word becomes a 'y' sound

Acknowledgements

The research on which this thesis is based was made possible by a postgraduate research studentship awarded by the Economic and Social Research Council and through affiliation with the Musée d'Art et d'Archeologie in *Antananarivo*. I am grateful to both institutions for their financial and academic assistance. I particularly thank *Razafiarivony Michel* for helping me to navigate through the necessary bureaucracy to obtain a long stay visa (twice!), for always expressing an interest in my work, and for inviting me to his home.

I amassed many debts before even departing for the field. I thank Peter Loizos for accepting me as an undergraduate at the LSE in spite of mixed references; Rita Astuti and Maurice Bloch for welcoming me back and helping me fill out grant applications when I decided to do a PhD; Johnny Parry and Peter Loizos for having faith in me when I handed in a less than distinguished research proposal; Philip Thomas who gave me good advice pre-fieldwork; and *Vola Hanta* who set me on my way to learning Malagasy in her sitting room in Arsenal.

In Madagascar my debts are many. In the capital I would like to thank all those at the Musée d'Art et d'Archeologie, the ever-friendly staff at the Hotel Karthala and my valued friends Troels Mortensen and Anne and Wouter Laleman with whom I shared great times and from whom I accepted wonderful hospitality. I also thank those at *Akany Havoza* (memorably dubbed the 'pig-huts' by Maurice) who nursed me when I was ill, and all the other people who generously entertained us when we were in town.

In southeast Madagascar it is hard to know where to begin. In *Farafangana* I thank Yves and his family for endlessly helping me out with practical problems, feeding me, improving my Malagasy and enthusing about the coastal peoples; I thank *Narcisse* for pointing the way; and I thank those at the Tulipes Rouges and the Cocotiers for providing what was occasionally a much needed haven.

In *Vondrozo* I owe an unrepayable debt to the *Ah Tang* family who put us up, nurtured and spoiled us, fed us freshly made treats, lent us a houseful of belongings and gave us innumerable rides in their trucks. To Mademoiselle, Madame and the late Monsieur *Ah Tang* in particular I express my heartfelt thanks for acting as surrogate parents. I thank *Frankie* and *Delia* for their kindness, *Bao* and *Christine* for looking after us, and *Mena* for uncomplainingly helping out with household duties. I pay special thanks to *Gervais* for tirelessly guiding us and to his wife, *Solange*, for always making an effort to include us and to explain everything. I also thank the *Seng* family who took great interest in our welfare; *Endrin'i Georgette* who rented us her house; and the staff at the Post Office who delivered our mail.

My greatest debt of all is to the people of *Sahafatra* themselves without whom I would have learnt nothing. Not only did they trust me and take me into their homes, they also took an active interest in what I was doing and went out of their way to humour me and answer my non-sensical questions. I will forever remain deeply moved by the generosity with which we were received

and full of admiration for the proud and independent lives they led.

It is impossible to single out everyone who deserves thanks here so I list just a few of the many who contributed to this work and became our friends: the late *Iaban 'i Tahody* and family; *Iaban 'i Zafitala* and family; *Tatahira* and family; *Iaban 'i Mahavelo* and family; *Tsaninena*; the *Rangahy* at *Masim-boay* and family; *Iaban 'i Nota* and family; *Iaban 'i Fano*; *Iaban 'i Kazafy* and family; *Iaban 'i Fianar* and family; the *Kobatany* at *Miarinarivo*; *Iaban 'i Ralay*; *Iaban 'i Berlet...*

Extra-special thanks goes to Fiona Wilson who came when I needed her and stayed for a year without hesitating to count the cost.

Writing up the thesis has not been easy. I thank all my fellow-students and teachers for their support and interest. In particular I would like to thank my supervisors Rita Astuti and Maurice Bloch who, in their different styles, nursed me through whole experience, treated me as a person rather than a machine, and had faith that it would all turn out all right. I also owe a great debt of gratitude to Fiona Wilson for putting up with me when I was unbearable and for rekindling my enthusiasm when my spirits were desperately low.

My final thanks go to friends and family who never ceased encouraging me, who refused to be rebuffed by my defensive answers to their questions, and who carried on asking to the bitter end: "So, how's it going?".

Madagascar

0 100 200 300km



Figure 1: the peoples of Madagascar

Introduction

The thesis will explore the nature of ‘rulers’ [*panjaka*] and the nature of ‘ruling’ in the land of *Sahafatra* in south-east Madagascar. It will describe and interpret the system of authority in operation in the region. I intend to demonstrate that the people of *Sahafatra* have developed an authority system very different to that found in other parts of the island. I assert that authority is not only based on access to blessing from the ancestors, which is the dominant existing theory of power [cf Bloch 1971; 1981b; Feeley-Harnik 1978; Huntington 1988; Wilson 1971; Middleton 1988], but also involves an active negotiation between ruler and subjects [cf Feeley-Harnik 1982; Beaujard 1983b] and a direct engagement with the force of the ‘environment’, known as ‘*Zanahary*’ in Malagasy [cf Bloch 1995a], designed to access an alternative source of fertility ¹.

Authority systems in Madagascar tend to be based on the premise that those who can create and channel fertility/blessing rule over those who cannot; thus, since the power of fertility is thought to reside with the ancestors, he who controls the ancestral tombs of the *Merina* rules [cf Bloch 1971; Graeber 1995]; likewise the *Sakalava* monarch who represents all his long dead royal ascendants rules also [cf Feeley-Harnik 1978]. In theory the ruler guarantees the fertility of his followers. In this configuration of power fertility and blessing are, therefore, two sides of the same coin: one is fertile because one is blessed, and one is blessed because one is fertile. This dual concept is central to Malagasy culture (in much the same way the dual concept of ‘honour’ and ‘shame’ is for Mediterranean societies) and is explicitly formulated at almost every ritual occasion when blessing is begged from the ancestors, and when, more specifically, the ancestors are asked to provide many healthy children for their descendants. The critical importance afforded to ‘fecundity’ [cf Bloch & Parry 1982:7] thus generates a political economy of fertility whereby those that are perceived of as the providers of the required fertility become rulers.

The stereotypical image of Madagascar as the ‘island of the ancestors’ [Mack 1986] suggests that this quest for fertility involves following a descent-based ideology (one which is in fact often male-biased) in order to access blessing from the powerful ancestors. Overall this interpretation, which privileges descent relations above all others, has been favoured by anthropologists working in Madagascar: Huntington has stressed the patrilineages [*tariky*] of the pastoral *Bara* [Huntington 1988]; Middleton has indicated the ‘essentialist’ nature of the *Karembola* who privilege endogamy in the agnatic line and in particular patrilineal parallel cousin (FaBrDa) marriage in order to maintain the essence of the descent group [Middleton 1988:174-179]; Bloch has underlined the overriding importance of the organisation of the descent-based tomb for the *Merina* [Bloch 1971; 1985]; Feeley-Harnik has concentrated on the dominance of dynastic relations amongst *Sakalava* royalty [Feeley-Harnik 1978; 1991b]; Wilson has emphasised the critical role descent plays in enabling successful *Tsimihety* migration [Wilson 1967; 1971]. However, as if to confuse matters, the people of *Sahafatra* have generated a system of authority that goes beyond descent and that is to an extent explicitly anti-descent. That is to say their paramount leaders are chosen to rule instead of being born to the role as we might expect them to be in a traditional descent-based system whose internal logic is played out to the full.

For such a system to work fertility must not only flow directly from and through the ancestors but must come from another source as well. Just such a situation is to be found in the land of *Sahafatra*, where fertility/blessing can be channelled more directly from the ‘environment’ [Zanahary]. This novel case scenario provides an ideal opportunity to elaborate on an underdeveloped aspect of Malagasy ethnography and to address the full complexity of the manipulation of the multiple (and interconnected) sources of power actually available to local actors. Suggestive and tangentially supporting evidence for the validity of this approach can be found in the writings of several authors on Madagascar: Middleton’s work on the *Karembola*, although stressing descent, recognises the critical importance of anti-descent relationships (most notably those involving the funerary priests [*tsimahaivelone*] who perform the rituals descent group members cannot) [cf Middleton 1988:543]; Astuti’s work on the *Vezo* [Astuti 1995a] emphasising the importance of performativity as opposed to descent encourages the questioning of descent [cf Fox 1987:174 on how in the Austronesian world social identity is not given at birth]; similarly Bloch’s work on *Zafimaniry* kinship theory highlighting the importance of

complementary marriages and the enduring houses that symbolize them [Bloch 1993b; 1995a; 1995b] shifts the point of enquiry away from descent. Indeed Bloch's earlier work on the *Merina* ritual of the royal bath [Bloch 1987b] illustrating how autochthonous elemental forces are harnessed by highland kings in order to rule different peoples [cf Bloch 1986:43-47] hints at alternative avenues of investigation situated outside the realm of descent.

Following the above lead, I endeavour to take advantage of the opportunity presented me in order to create a more complete picture of the nature of power, as exercised in Madagascar. By moving away from the trend to overstress descent I will re-introduce some of the neglected symbolic and elemental aspects of power. In particular, I will show how the dichotomy between the sacred and political dimensions of power as separate fields of investigation, as put forward by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard in their introduction to 'African Political Systems' [Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1940], is problematic in the Malagasy setting and "obscures the intimate connection between the sacred and political dimension of power in African polities" [Simonse 1992:1]. A return to the school of thought championed by Frazer emphasising the symbolic and divine aspects of leadership is more revealing in the *Sahafatra* case so long as it remains married to political pragmatism. This is because the paramount leaders in the land of *Sahafatra* could be said, in several senses, to be 'divine'. In a quote, whose contents will be echoed throughout the thesis, Adler, a follower of Frazer, describes a royal festival in Chad and makes clear the nature of 'divine' leadership and the social contract it involves:

"He [the king in Moundang] is the provider of oxen for the sacrifices, of jars of millet beer for the libations, and of all the food and drink that the population assembled at his palace consumes on these occasions.....Still, the obligation to provide sacrificial meat and drink; the fact that his dwelling is the place, even, to a certain extent, the object of worship; finally, the imperious necessity to regale his people with generosity essentially define the religious functions of the king. But these functions are not attributed to him solely by virtue of a particular distribution of roles in the religious organisation of society, for the king is not one of, or the first among, the religious dignitaries but rather, one might say, the minister of a cult whose object he himself partially incarnates. More precisely, it is the invisible force, the beneficent and maleficent power which the reigning sovereign is supposed to have over nature, and on which the regularity of the seasons, the fertility of the fields etc., depends, that puts him on the level of powers which human

rituals and prayers must influence to keep away drought, famine and epidemics. This form of authority, which ethnologists have called sacred, or, more hesitantly, divine kingship, following Frazer's expression, thus implies a radical division within the person of the king: on the one hand, he is the receptacle of an atemporal power that fell first upon the founding hero of the dynasty and has been passed down to the present king via all the sovereigns who have preceded him; on the other hand, he is the possessor of a temporal and temporary power whose enjoyment has no other justification - even though it has other effects - than to put this power in the service of society" [Adler 1982:180-181].

The relevance of this is immediately clear in the land of *Sahafatra* where, apparently unlike in some other areas of Madagascar, ancestors do not have a monopoly on the control of fertility. Other means of promoting and ensuring fertility/blessing have been constructed depending more on the control of the living [cf Feeley-Harnik 1986] and mastery of the land by elected leaders [*panjaka*] than on control of the dead by ancestral representatives; a sort of divine relationship between leader, land and people, along the lines of that sketched above, is thus implicated. Although the idea of hierarchical structures headed by divine leaders is not an entirely new formulation as far as the ethnography of Madagascar is concerned the particular nature of the divine leadership found in the land of *Sahafatra* is remarkable. The power of both *Sakalava* and *Merina* kings was, for example, predicated on a putative or real connection to royal ancestors [cf Feeley-Harnik 1978; 1982; 1991b; Bloch 1981a; 1985; 1987b]; *Sahafatra* divine leaders, in contrast, make no such claim, instead deriving their power from an ability to marshal their subjects so as to recreate life-giving elemental reactions in human terms, thereby accessing an alternative source of fertility and well-being.

I am not trying to imply that descent is absent as an idiom in the *Sahafatra* case; quite the opposite in fact. Converse to what we might expect descent remains a major structuring principle; however, although generally adhered to the principle of descent is sometimes purposefully rejected and emphatically denied. The point is that, unlike the *Merina* and *Sakalava* cases, descent is not the governing principle, or the *raison d'être* that must always be returned to. The *Sakalava* use the control of slaves and the idiom of enslavement to construct and express royal power but all with the aim of underlining and shoring up the unique qualities of descent

embodied by the ruling monarch [cf Feeley-Harnik 1978; 1982; 1983; 1984]; the *Merina* use the fiery force of water to bolster their power in royal rituals but all within the framework of descent and with the aim of revitalising descent [cf Bloch 1986; 1987b]. The *Sahafatra* system is radically different; it is not about incorporating human and elemental forces into descent models, as are the *Sakalava* and *Merina* systems respectively, but about generating an entirely new and independent form of power that can be recreated again and again irrespective of descent.

The thesis will show how the generation of an alternative source of fertility is dependent on a complex relationship between a (divine) ruler [*panjaka*], his subjects and the ‘environment’ [*Zanahary*]; only when the three elements are in correct relation with each other is fertility/blessing forthcoming [cf Bloch 1985; Bloch 1987b on *Merina* royal rituals, Feierman 1996 for a comparable Tanzanian example, and Lan 1985 for a Zimbabwean case]. The thesis will attempt to demonstrate that this correct relation takes the form of a metaphorical sacrifice thus contributing to the great Frazerian debate, over whether divine kings are necessarily victims, instigated by ‘The Golden Bough’. In the land of *Sahafatra* great men are metaphorically ‘sacrificed’, as the Shilluk leaders of the past analysed by Evans-Pritchard were said to have been [cf Evans-Pritchard 1948], in order to make the connection between the fertility of the people and the fertility of the land, thereby guaranteeing the fertility/blessing of the clan.

Such an argument will illuminate the general discussion of ‘divine’, so called ‘scapegoat’ [cf Simonse 1992 on the Sudan], kings, addressing the problem of how such kings must be situated both inside and outside of human society in order to be powerful and how a corollary of this artificially dual nature is their expendability [cf Adler 1982²]. The fact that the king is simply a tool to be used and controlled by his subjects and that he is, in a sense, made ‘non-human’ facilitates his replacement [cf Simonse 1992:345-373]. To substantiate this argument will inevitably involve articulating the precise and particular nature of the interface between ‘nature’ and ‘society’ [cf Descola & Palsson 1996] and the nature of ‘nature’ itself. The peculiar seamlessness of ‘nature’ and ‘society’ in the land of *Sahafatra* is what goes to make the *Sahafatra* ‘environment’ [*Zanahary*] extra-ordinary and provides a perfect opportunity to demonstrate how ‘divine’ leadership is predicated on the creation of an artificial division between humans and their ‘environment’; ‘divine’ leaders are ‘divine’ because the artificial division

allows them the chance to recombine what has been sundered, thereby reconstituting a holistic world and (if only temporarily) proving their mastery of it [cf Bloch 1987b].

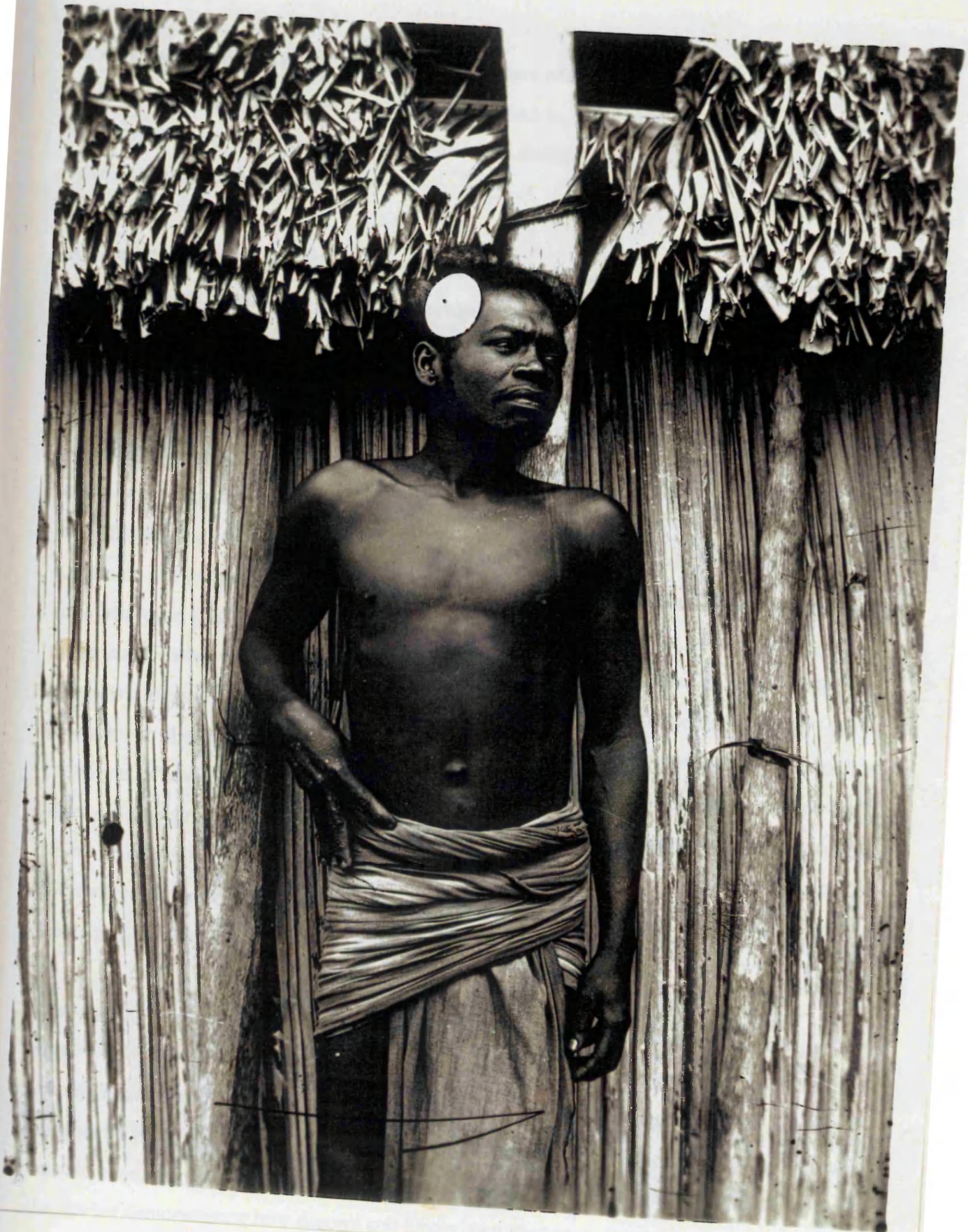
In order to give a full picture of the nature of ruling I will set out how '*panjaka*', the traditional kind of ruler in the area, derive their power from a combination of sources: a strong patrilineal descent-based ideology; the favourable judgement of their performance by their subjects, based on certain fixed criteria; and the ability to access and channel the force of the 'environment' [*Zanahary*] for the benefit of the people. The thesis will thus show that rulers rule not just because of who they are, but also because of what they do [cf Astuti 1995a; 1995b]³. In order to demonstrate this I shall show that there is a change in the nature of power as one ascends the traditional hierarchy. This change essentially consists in the cumulative combination of different 'layers' of authority⁴, each 'layer' being built on the foundation of the previous one. The more senior a *panjaka* [ruler] you are, the more 'layers' you must combine.

The three most important types of *panjaka* [ruler] are listed below, in ascending order of hierarchy, along with the associated 'layer' of authority they have attained. I introduce these characters now in order to outline briefly the theme to be developed in the following chapters.

Fathers (the first layer): the foundations of the authority system consist of the irreducible Fathers [*iaba*] who, as heads of extended households, are the symbols of descent-based blessing and order. Their authority is descent-based.

Minders of the One House (the second layer): above the Fathers are figures known as Minders of the One House [*piambina trano iray*]. They are heads of sacralised houses (known as Big-Houses) representing all the members of a set of extended households. To be successful they must not only act as Fathers but must also prove their worthiness to rule by passing certain separate tests of their quality set by their subjects. Their position is performance based.

Earth-Shakers (the third layer): finally, at the top of the hierarchy above the Minders of the One House, are men known as Earth-Shakers [*kobatany*]. They rule over all the members of a collection of Big-Houses and are associated with the land. They must not only act as Fathers and



1964

... through metal (cf Bloch 1987; and Black 1986 on the dynamics of the ...)

A panjaka of the past

pass the tests needed to prove themselves as Minders of the One House; they must also be able to take advantage of their connection with the land in order to generate additional forms of fertility/blessing. This final layer is based on the ability to appropriate fertility/blessing from sources outside of the ancestors.

By exploring the ‘layering’ of authority throughout the thesis I hope to be able to give an accurate picture of what it is to rule and be ruled on a variety of levels in *Sahafatra*. I also hope to be able to show how rulers and ruled are mutually dependent on each other as Feeley-Harnik has so ably demonstrated for the case of the *Sakalava* [cf Feeley-Harnik 1982; 1986]. By talking about qualitatively different ‘layers’ which are combined in subtle and complex ways I intend to move beyond over-simplistic characterisations of power. In the West there has been a tendency to treat power simply as a relation of inequality [cf Adams & Folgelson 1977] whereas in south-east Asia there has been a concentration on power as a quality [cf Errington 1989; Anderson 1990; Geertz 1980]. Neither of these constructions is sufficient to explain the *Sahafatra* case which requires re-problematizing the concept of power. I shall outline a new dynamics of power which demonstrates a perpetual tension between power as a relationship and power as a quality. This new formulation helps to explain the rather uncertain status of leaders [*panjaka*] in the land of *Sahafatra* who cannot really be categorised within the monolithic paradigms of power given above; for neither can they be said to be ‘Big Men’ (whose power is based on cultivating relations of upward mobility) nor ‘Sovereigns’ (whose power is meant to be an intrinsic trait or quality) [cf Simonse 1992:38-39]; rather, their power is situated somewhere in between the two loci. ‘*Panjaka*’ may aspire to the permanence of recognised innate power (a quality) but they never manage to fully achieve it.

The larger theoretical question to be tackled is how and why such a system is satisfying to the people of *Sahafatra*. How does a system so contradictory to the ideology of descent manage to run in tandem with it? More controversially how was it born out of that very ideology? Suggestive parallels are provided by Astuti’s work on the *Vevo* demonstrating how descent considerations are postponed until after death [cf Astuti 1995a; 1995b], and by Bloch’s work on the *Merina* demonstrating how descent and forces contradictory to it can be accommodated and worked out through ritual [cf Bloch 1987; and Bloch 1986 on the dynamics of the *Merina*

circumcision ritual]. My argument however takes a slightly different course; instead of arguing that a structural accommodation is made allowing for forces contrary to descent to be incorporated and ritually manipulated within the overall kinship system I will show that an ethic of testing, providing an alternative to descent, has appeared. I will argue that from a template of descent other possibilities for structuring the group emerged. The force behind this transition stems from a change in inter-group relations whereby traditionally war-like behaviour has been replaced by an array of unofficial competitive contests. Enforced pacification transformed relations of direct conflict into relations of indirect competition: competition over natural resources, competition over wealth in cattle, competition over who could generate the most fertility/blessing, and competition over who could prove themselves to be the greatest without resorting to crude physical violence.

The consequence of this transformation was a diversification of the arenas of competition and the generation of a sort of 'competitive nature' whereby the people of *Sahafatra* are forever comparing themselves to their contemporaries or to neighbouring groups in order to gauge how well they are doing [cf Errington 1989:139-141 on competition between 'status-peers' ⁵]. This 'competitive nature' seems to be a result of the lack of interpenetrating hierarchies in operation in the area. In much of Madagascar and throughout much of the history of state formation in Madagascar there has been an inherent tension between the resident, occupying 'owners of the land' [*tompontany/vazimba*] and incoming conquering groups [cf Raison-Jourde 1983:24-26]. The nascent *Merina* state is a prime example of such a tension with the rampant incoming '*hova*' nobles making a strategic compromise by marrying, literally and politically, the mythical autochthons, the '*vazimba*', in order to consolidate their power [cf Raison-Jourde 1983:24-26]. The foundation for this tactic is based on the fact that the 'owners of the land' tend to be more strongly associated with the elemental forces of the land than the recently arrived conquerors. The 'owners' are therefore essential to the 'incomers' who proceed to create a symbiotic relationship around them in order to be party to this power. In this arrangement the elemental power of the land (accessible to the residents) is exchanged for the ethereal blessing [*hasy*] offered by the ritual specialist 'incomers'. Such an inter-penetrating and inter-dependent scheme is brilliantly described by Philippe Beaujard for the *Tanala*: autochthonous commoners and incoming 'nobles' [*andriana*] cooperate in a complex schematic equilibrium of power [cf

Beaujard 1983a; 1983b]. In such a system there is a dual social order consisting of two groups representing contrasting values, attachment to the land versus the ability to give blessing, interacting with each other.

In the land of *Sahafatra* such a system does not exist. The entire population recognise themselves as equally recent migrants to the area undermining any potential structural opposition between 'owners' and 'incomers'. Instead of forming dyadic inter-penetrating and inter-dependent social orders, like the *Tanala* and the *Merina*, each clan remained strictly independent of its neighbours; however, in spite of the lack of ordered interaction, the clans did imitate and mirror each others hierarchical systems. The result is a set of almost identical hierarchies running in parallel with each other in place of a single, complex unified hierarchy. The absence of a structured opposition between clans has interesting implications. I would argue that just because the original aforementioned tension is not expressed in a dual social order involving opposed groups does not mean that the tension does not still exist. In the land of *Sahafatra* there is still concern to control the forces associated with the land and to control blessing; however, these are expressed not through the creation of a two-tiered social order but through contrasting idioms contained within a single social order. These idioms, as I will show, are the competing idioms of descent (concerned with blessing) and 'testing' (concerned with controlling elemental forces) [cf Humphrey 1995 for a Mongolian parallel consisting of chiefs with a narrow view of nature concerned with descent, and opposed shamans concerned with broader sets of elemental forces].

In the course of the thesis I intend to demonstrate how pertinent mytho-historical episodes have led to the creation and expression of a particular type of 'competitive nature' and how this, combined with a strict adherence and attachment to a particular mode of subsistence (a way of life dedicated to wet rice agriculture), has allowed new conceptions concerning the nature of fertility and power to be produced and maintained. These new conceptions serve to show that power is not just a relationship between people but that it is also a relationship between people and their 'environment' expressed through testing; the creation of power by leaders and their subjects not only aligns people in hierarchies but also helps to define the very 'nature' of those people and the 'environment' they live in.

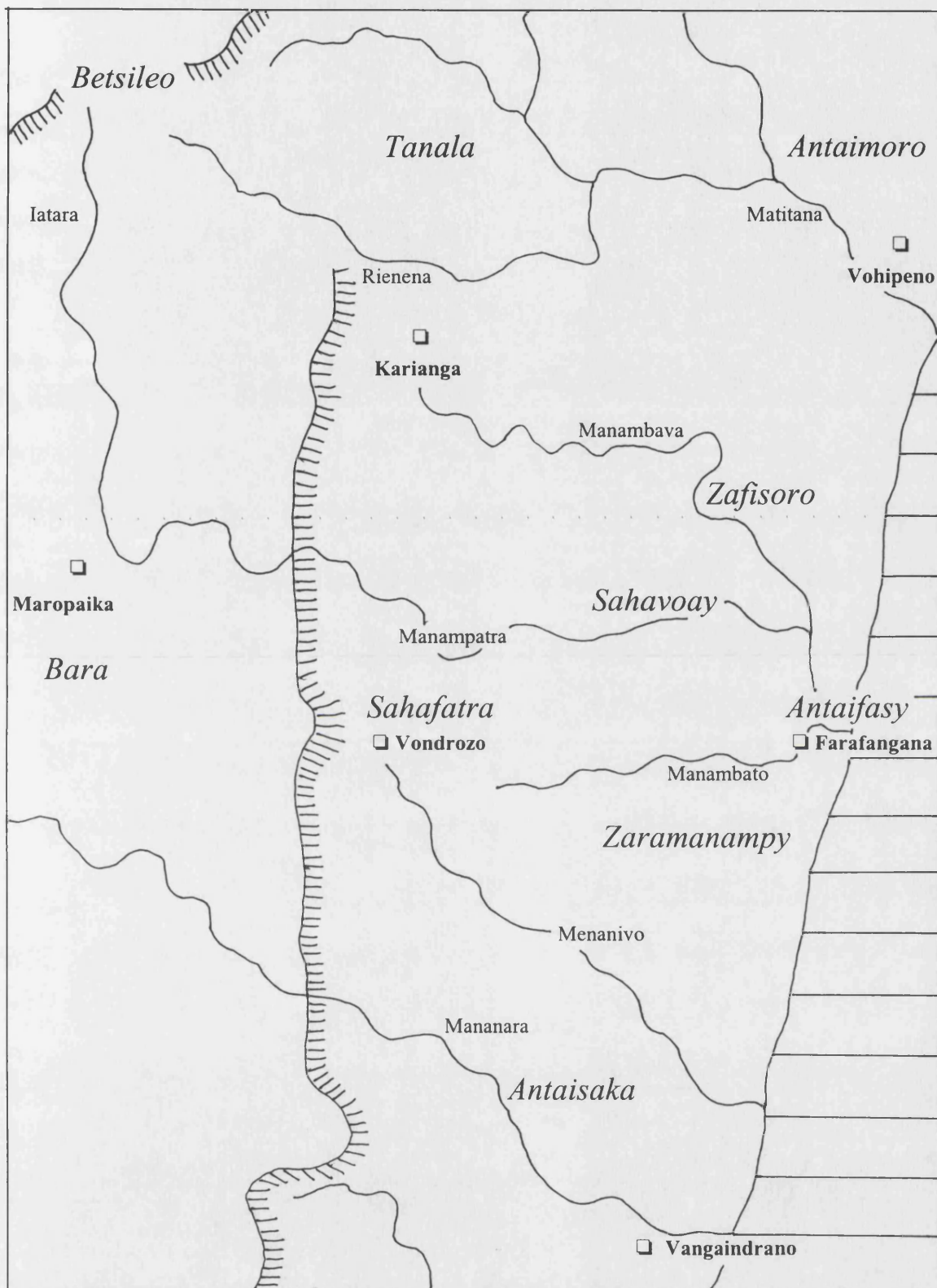


Figure 2: regional geography - rivers, peoples and towns

Setting the scene: discovery and first arrival

The first time I visited the field site was as part of a reconnaissance trip made one year before I commenced the main body of fieldwork in early September 1997. Fiona Wilson [my long-term girlfriend] and I, who were spending 6 months exploring Madagascar while investigating potential field sites, decided to head to the provincial town of *Farafangana*, on the south-east coast of the island, in order to search out a people known as *Sahafatra*.

I had first heard about these people back in London from one of my supervisors, Maurice Bloch. He had mentioned a region in the south-east of the country known as *Sahafatra*, which he had learnt about from a man teaching in *Zafimaniry*-land. According to this informant, who was originally from the region, the people of *Sahafatra* were little-known and merited study, not least because they practised a strange system of rotating kingship. I was excited by this exotic sounding institution and by the fact that the area had not been written about. My curiosity aroused, I made further inquiries and, reassured to find only a few vague references to *Sahafatra* in the available literature, I added the name to my mental map of places to visit on the forthcoming trip.

Now in Madagascar we had ended up in *Farafangana*, which we surmised to be the nearest major urban centre to the target zone. Having quizzed the locals as to the whereabouts of the mysterious people of *Sahafatra*, we found ourselves loaded onto a little truck heading inland for the small town of *Vondrozo*. 8 hours later, long after darkness had fallen we were still going. The late rains had turned the dirt road into a treacherous morass and every few minutes the truck, which was all the while threatening to topple over, had to be dug out of trouble. Eventually, about 6 km short of our objective, the truck went one manoeuvre too far and did finally overturn. Fiona who was on what became the top side of the cab, found herself rapidly making friends with the driver, while I ended up buried underneath the goods at the back. Uninjured but groaning to make sure I was not forgotten, I and the other trapped passengers were slowly disinterred. Feeling rather sorry for ourselves, we abandoned the truck and set out to finish the journey on foot under the gently falling rain, eventually arriving in *Vondrozo* after midnight. As helpless foreigners we were shepherded into the compound of *Monsieur Seng*, one of the

Chinese/Malagasy traders in the town, in order to ask for shelter. Although it was the middle of the night a room was immediately vacated for us and we gratefully collapsed, muddy and exhausted, into bed.

Despite our slightly inauspicious arrival, the generosity of spirit with which we were received became the enduring hallmark of our stay. *Monsieur Seng* fed, housed and entertained us over the five days we used to make a preliminary exploration of the region and everywhere we went we were welcomed into people's homes to eat and talk. Each day we set out in a different direction, with the son [*Pascal*] and son-in-law [*Gervais*] of a *Sahafatra* teacher [*Narcisse*] we had met in *Farafangana* acting as guides. They took us through the beautiful but empty countryside under the shadow of the forested escarpment to visit their kin in nearby villages. Once there they helped explain that we were interested in learning about their way of life and that if all went well we might return to live there. In each village large numbers of people would assemble to welcome us, eager to be introduced and to tell us something of themselves. They expressed a sense of difference to the surrounding peoples that made a strong impression on us. Their warmth, the rapidity with which they picked up on what we wanted to do, and their enthusiasm for the project won us over. So much so that when we eventually left I was almost certain that I would return.

Fieldwork

When I did return to *Vondrozo* about 15 months later, it was alone. Fiona and I had decided that it was probably best if I did fieldwork by myself; after all, we naively argued, what would she do all day, every day, if she came? My first month was full of feverish activity. Not only was I homesick and anxious to get going on 'real' fieldwork, I had also managed to arrive at the height of the ceremonial season. Almost the first thing I did was to meet up with *Gervais*, one of our guides from the previous year, in order to ask him if he wanted to work with me again. He, being somewhat at a loose end and eager for an excuse to explore the area, agreed. *Gervais* was almost the ideal candidate to act as guide. He was not born locally but, while working on a road-building project, had met and married a local woman called *Solange*. They, along with

their two small children, *Gerald* and *Marie-Ange*, now lived permanently in *Vondrozo*, running a little 'hotely', where people would come to meet, eat and drink.

Gervais' situation (marital and occupational) gave a good balance to the research, as it allowed him to be treated as both an 'insider' and an 'outsider'. As an 'insider' he was part of a large and welcoming extended family spread over the countryside in who's life we were free to participate, and yet as an 'outsider' he was always a bit removed from the action, curious, like me, as to the local way of doing and saying things. Of particular importance was *Gervais*' intelligence and his enjoyment of the challenge of learning and teaching at the same time. It proved invaluable to have someone skilful and patient to act as an intermediary, someone who was able to bridge the gap between the local dialect and the official Malagasy that I was initially more familiar with. The fact that *Gervais* was also educated enough to understand the type of knowledge that I was looking for was an additional bonus: when others could find no alternative way of explaining something, *Gervais* normally could.

Having cleared the proposed research with the fearsome *Commandant de Brigade* we got started almost immediately. *Gervais* helped me find a room to rent in town, and insisted on sleeping there too, to protect me from the 80 year old landlady who was said to be a witch. Everyday we ventured out into the countryside on foot to see whatever was happening. We visited the most important villages and introduced ourselves to the local leaders; we dropped in on *Gervais*' kin and began to pick up on the family gossip; we learnt about farming and joined in to help when we could; we discussed the fluctuating prices at the coffee market; we attended moonlit circumcision ceremonies, the installation of new 'chiefs' and commemorations of the dead. At the beginning it was hard to understand what was going on but we went anyway and asked questions of anyone willing to listen. We covered many miles together and spent many nights in each others company as guests in distant villages. Over the weeks and the months what had initially been a temporary arrangement, gradually turned into a permanent bond; *Gervais* became not only my guide, but also my research assistant and friend. Without him I would have accomplished very little. Over the next month we aimed to demarcate the field of research. Apart from daytime reconnaissances made from *Vondrozo* we also travelled hundreds of miles in broad loops mapping out the villages and territories of the clans claiming to be '*Sahafatra*',

sleeping in whatever village we found ourselves as darkness fell. The groundwork completed, we returned to *Vondrozo* to take stock.

By this stage I was lonely and missing Fiona terribly. I was overwhelmed by the friendliness of almost everyone I had met, but I was also overwhelmed by being the continual subject of intense scrutiny. As they looked at me, commenting on my difference, so I felt different. Although I felt close enough to my Malagasy friends to be moved to tears by events on various occasions, I never actually felt myself to be one of them, as I had imagined I would before commencing fieldwork. The realisation that my life simply did not depend on the same things theirs did came quickly and effected me deeply. Even though I farmed with people my life did not depend on a successful harvest; even though I learnt to appreciate the power of their leaders I was not subject to their authority; even though I could see the many charms of Malagasy women I did not want to marry one. Renewed reflection led me to the conclusion that I should be there to try to share, experience and appreciate their lives rather than to prove my ability to be accepted literally as one of them. My conveniently changed perception of fieldwork allowed me to give in to my loneliness. I travelled to *Farafangana* and telephoned Fiona to ask her to join me in the field. Happily for me, she agreed.

The arrival of Fiona and her full participation in the fieldwork was a great joy for me. Not only did my loneliness evaporate overnight but the whole nature of fieldwork changed. Being able to share the experience made it real in a way that it had not been before. Fiona's warmth and empathy earned us many friends and her perceptiveness and powers of description brought them to life. While I always tended to look at events and people in a rather over self-conscious anthropological way, Fiona saw them vividly for what they were. Whereas my notebooks are full of laboured factual descriptions and the mechanical details of rituals, Fiona's are loaded with atmosphere, evoking what it was actually like to be there. Her human approach turned informants into people, and events into significant moments in these people's lives.

The fact that I was not alone, but was rather part of a community of two, explains my schizophrenic use of 'I' and 'we' throughout the text. I make no apologies for the inconsistency because it represents the actual state of affairs on the ground. Out of 16 months fieldwork, Fiona

was present for a year; it is clear then that most of the important work was carried out together and merits the use of 'we'. Otherwise I use 'I'. However, it is not quite so straightforward; some of my interpretations and assertions Fiona would not necessarily agree with, in which case I use 'I' whether she was present or not. To try and be too precise on this point would be ridiculous; I simply wish to make clear that, although the final conclusions are mine, fieldwork was carried out as a couple. This work is the result of that joint effort.

Living arrangements

During my initial reconnaissance I had discovered that the people of *Sahafatra* consisted of many clans spread out in exclusive territories across the region. Since I was interested in studying the interaction between clans as well as the make-up of individual clans I decided we should locate ourselves in a neutral and central position. *Vondrozo*, as the local administrative and market centre, situated in the midst of the clans, seemed the obvious choice. It acted as a magnet for all the local clans, and lay within easy striking distance of several of them. Consequently we had access to all the clans without being exclusively affiliated to any single one of them. *Vondrozo* also acted as the major node of the informal information network; if a major event was happening in the countryside we would always hear about it in advance when the organisers came to buy provisions and spread the word. Our presence in town therefore ensured that we did not miss any vital events.

Luckily a small house right in the middle of town, opposite two of the three major shops, came up for rent just before Fiona arrived. It sat on a stone and concrete base, had wattle and daub walls coated with more concrete, and a tin roof that made it roastingly hot in summer. All these features were considered to be luxury. It consisted of three rooms. From the front window you could watch the world go by on the central thoroughfare, while at the back you could sit quietly looking into the coffee bushes that lead down to the well. We moved in immediately and tried to make ourselves comfortable. We turned the rooms into a bedroom with in situ mosquito net, a room for receiving visitors covered with traditional reed mats, and a kitchen where we cooked on a small charcoal stove. We commissioned a little wooden stall to be built at the back so that

we could take bucket showers, and we had an outdoor fire-place covered so that we could cook rice properly, over the heat of a real wood-fire, whatever the weather.

All the furniture (including a bed) and utensils that we needed were lent to us by the ever-kind *Mama Tang*, a Chinese-Malagasy trader living across the road, who mothered us like the children she never had. A local girl, *Mena*, helped us everyday by collecting water and filling our plastic storage barrels, by doing our laundry, and by hunting out and buying elusive products like chickens, meat and vegetables from the market. As we became better known, people began to knock on the door to sell us local products: eggs, milk, freshwater prawns, hedgehogs, guinea-fowl...

In effect we were the only white people in town since *Mon Pere Rafaely*, the Polish catholic priest, was widely regarded as having gone native. He, though friendly, pretty much kept himself to himself, except for one brief introduction and a Chinese-style Christmas dinner we all attended at *Mama Tang's*. Occasionally we saw him emerging from what he called the 'foreigners' shop (the one owned by *Mama Tang*!) clutching a packet of Gauloises or we caught a glimpse of his bearded and be-goggled face and his combat trousers flashing by as he sped off on his motorbike to visit a village in the back of beyond.

The consequence of our perceived singularity was that our moving in caused a commotion. For the first few weeks we had no privacy whatsoever. Perfect strangers walked in unannounced, plonked themselves down on the floor, and waited to be entertained, while children crowded round the window and simply stared however much I tried to admonish them. Eventually *Mama Tang*, seeing our dilemma, sent one of her workmen round to build a fence round the house with a little entrance gate. With this acting as a psychological barrier to complete strangers things soon calmed down. Even so our otherworldliness never ceased to amaze people. In one unfortunate incident we were spotted bathing in one of the rivers a few kilometres out of town. The man who saw us was so amazed at the spectacle of these two white forms that he ran away and spread the story that Mary and Joseph had fallen from the sky back to Earth. The story spread all the way to *Farafangana* and pious pilgrims began to arrive in *Vondrozo* in search of the miracle... Only after the police intervened did the flow of pilgrims stop.

The rhythm of fieldwork: making friends and daily life

The nature of the way we lived informed the way we did fieldwork. As an independent household we depended on visiting others and on being visited ourselves. This was never a problem and we rapidly built up an extensive network of friendships with people from at least 5 clans, spanning about 20 villages. The truth was that although we lived in town our social life revolved around these surrounding villages. We were involved in reciprocal relationships, taking and receiving gifts, right from the start; by the end, if anything, it became a burden to have such a large group of friends because they expected us to visit more often than we realistically could, and were hurt by our long absences.

Having our own house taught us the difficult skill of giving as well as receiving hospitality [cf Riud 1960:8-13]. It was not always easy to interpret what exactly people required of us. As we discovered hosting is a fine art which depends as much on supplying a rice-meal as it does on conversation. Market-day, when all our friends tended to descend on us at the same time, often the worse for wear, could be a very stressful time; so much so that, to my shame, I sometimes had to shut up the house and pretend we were not in.

We would normally be woken up by the light and the noise of the cocks crowing at about 5.30 a.m. After doing our ablutions we would eat some sort of rice-breads, bought from a nearby stall or commissioned in advance, accompanied by coffee with concentrated milk while deciding how we were going to spend the day. Inevitably *Gervais* would come round to discuss the latest news, tell us of any impending events or places of interest he had heard about, and help finalise a plan of action. Once we were all agreed, we would shut up the house and go over to the shop to do our morning greetings and buy a small gift for whoever we were going to visit. This usually consisted of something regarded as a treat; a few leaves of tobacco, a packet of biscuits, or a small quantity of locally distilled rum sold illegally from under the counter. We would then leave town, greeting the fifty or so acquaintances who happened to cross our path, before breaking into the countryside proper.

Walks along the rural paths were very peaceful and companionable. They were a good time to

reflect, to chat with *Gervais* and to question him on any matters that had been puzzling me. Only laden with a satchel containing notepad and camera, and an umbrella to protect against fierce sun as well as torrential rain, the walks were not normally too taxing. They were, however, time consuming as they often involved climbing and descending innumerable hillsides and crossing rice-paddies and rivers on tricky stepping stones or bridges made of single slippery tree trunks. The round trip journey-time to the villages we visited varied between about one and six hours; over the whole fieldwork period I estimate that we traversed several thousand miles.

The hours and miles spent travelling were never boring and probably taught us more than any other single aspect of fieldwork. We always took the opportunity to stop to watch and talk to the people working in the fields, and to pass the time of day with those we met heading in the opposite direction. The nosy local custom of always asking where anyone was coming from and going to, along with the purpose of their journey was endlessly informative and entertaining. It soon became a fun game to guess the intentions of oncoming columns of people by reading into what they were carrying, what they were wearing, the order in which they were walking, and the make-up of the group; we knew that we would discover the truth of the matter at our imminent meeting.

Since everyone criss-crossed the landscape on foot, the sum of our chance encounters allowed us to build up a picture of the full range of human purposes motivating such journeys. Most commonly people were going to market or the fields, but they were also off to marriages, funerals, public debates, circumcisions, celebrations of the dead and so on. Many invitations to events stemmed from these random encounters. Repeated journeys not only allowed us to register these patterns of movement and motivation but also enabled us to see how the crops were coming along through the course of the whole year, and how individual homesteads were developing. We often fantasised about building our own homestead as we noticed ideal spots en route, and enthused about the apparent potential of the land. When we finally came to a village it was often what we had seen and heard on the way that provided the major topics of conversation.

On arrival we would enter the house of our friend, go through the expected formal greetings, and

present our gift. For the rest of the day, as long as we were welcome, we tried to join in with whatever was going on, which normally involved chatting, cooking, eating and drinking and generally participating in the comings and goings of the house. At certain times of the year we might all go to the fields to help transplant or harvest rice or to help trample a paddy, or to learn how to plant manioc or prune coffee; at other times we might all attend a family ceremony or go off to a larger festival. However, most important was the fact that on every occasion, whatever we did, we were party to the unfolding dramas thrown up by complicated family dynamics in operation within the house. It is hard to convey the wonderful cosiness of these smoky houses and the intense sense of inclusion we felt inside them. By being in one-roomed households for hours on end, waiting with numb bums from sitting on the floor for the obligatory communal midday rice meal to be prepared, we learnt how different types of people tended to react and respond to the demands they put on each other.

.....

Since it was the duty of local leaders to host strangers it was these men who tended to become our friends [cf Errington 1989:22-23 for a similar fieldwork perspective]. This meant that we inevitably learnt a lot about the nature and structure of authority; after all, the best informants, the rulers themselves, were obliged to take care of us! Of particular interest was the way other guests, messengers, subjects, relatives and tribute payers approached and handled these men who were often regarded as powerful and potentially dangerous. Eventually, whoever the host was, we would beg our leave and head back 'home' to *Vondrozo*, chewing over the happenings and gossip of the day on the way. We tended to arrive at our little house, tired out from our efforts, in the late-afternoon or early evening. The remaining daylight hours would be spent writing up notes, buying anything we needed for supper and talking to anyone who happened by.

When darkness fell at about 7 p.m. it signalled that the 'public' part of the day was over. No-one would visit now unless it was an emergency, as they were all shut up in the domestic worlds of their own houses. I might nip out to buy a beer (cooled in the kerosene powered fridge of *Mama Tang*) and have a chat in the shop; then we would light the candles (or the pressure lantern if I was feeling energetic) and settle down to some relaxed cooking, with the radio in the background to keep us company. By 9.30 p.m., exhausted, we would climb under the mosquito net and fall asleep.

Special events and journeys

Although most of our days were spent as has roughly been described above, there were many exceptions. For example, whenever there was an important event occurring outside *Vondrozo* that lasted longer than a day, or that was difficult to reach, we would pack a rucksack, set out early and spend a night or two there in a 'guest-hut'. On these occasions we would tend to ask more formal questions concerning the event and would ask permission to take photos. Every now and again I would record some singing or a blessing but I kept this to a minimum as it seemed to inhibit people and make them behave unnaturally.

Every couple of months we would take a 'break' somewhere else in Madagascar to refresh ourselves. When we returned we often did so by foot, exploring the regions around, and entry points to, the land of *Sahafatra*: we walked between *Vondrozo* and *Farafangana* several times; we walked from *Vohimary* to *Vondrozo*; we once came from *Ambalavao*, through the forested escarpment, to *Karianga* and on to *Vondrozo* following the tobacco sellers trail; and, after Fiona left, I rode a bicycle from *Ihosy*, to *Ivohibe*, to *Maropaika* and on to *Vondrozo* along with the long distance cattle-herders from *Bara* country.

Changing perspectives on fieldwork

During the first months Fiona and I took the opportunity to ask everybody about everything. As privileged outsiders we were allowed to be present at most events and we were immediately forgiven for any social gaffes we made. In order to learn the language properly and discover further avenues for enquiry we had to be brazen. However, after a while, when we had mastered some social conventions we became more reticent. It was not that it was rude to ask direct questions just that it made us, as questioners, the centre of attention.

As fieldwork progressed I found that I was less inclined to ask direct questions and more inclined to take a back seat as a silent observer. In the end many of the most interesting conversations I heard happened in spite of my being there, rather than because I was there. Having mapped out

the basic ‘mechanics’ of life, what was done when and how, I became more concerned with the ‘poetics’, the reason why things were done. The best reason I can now see for staying for so long was that by the end I felt I was beginning to understand some of the unexpressed, underlying, implicit motivations for people’s actions.

Although the claim to be able to ‘read’ unspoken motivation can never be fully realised or justified, it is only by striving towards that end that an interpretation of people’s behaviour can have any meaning. By attempting to explore hidden motivation, as well as to describe action, I hope to convey the richness and complexity of peoples’ lives which might otherwise be obscured by the harshness of their unforgiving and never-ending subsistence lifestyle.

The place: area and concentration of study

This study concerns the various clans living in the environs of the small administrative market-town of *Vondrozo* in south-east Madagascar. The sum of these clans is known collectively under the blanket term '*Sahafatra*'. Due to the complexity of the term it is necessary to explain how I will use the term '*Sahafatra*' in the thesis from the outset. As we will see in the next chapter, the term '*Sahafatra*' can be used, interchangeably, to refer to the land or the people inhabiting it. For the purpose of clarity I will differentiate between the two different meanings by referring to the 'people of *Sahafatra*' and the 'land of *Sahafatra*' as and when appropriate. I adopt these phrases because they are accurate and technical terms. However, the fact that both meanings are contained in the same single term '*Sahafatra*' demonstrates an important truth: the inseparability of the people and the land. This inseparability is an important feature of what it is to be '*Sahafatra*'. I therefore retain the unqualified term '*Sahafatra*' when I want to convey the 'character' of the people; that which makes them feel different to the surrounding groups. When I coin the term '*Sahafatra*' in this sense I am using it as an active, multi-vocal label of identity. This identity is one which the people themselves are constantly redefining and exploring and which I will also examine during the course of the thesis.

The people of *Sahafatra*, who numbered about 25,000 in 1959 [Deschamps/Vianes 1959:83] and who are approximately 60,000 now [La Tribune de Madagascar, June 1994], occupy the administrative district of *Vondrozo* which is situated about 68 kilometres from the southeast coastal port of *Farafangana*. They inhabit an intermediate zone, made-up of small, largely bare hills, sandwiched between the flat coastal plains and a steep forested escarpment leading to the high plateaux of the interior. The people of *Sahafatra* practise a mixture of agriculture and cattle-keeping. The flat valley-bottoms are flooded for wet-rice cultivation; the steeper slopes are utilised for manioc and coffee; and the grassy savannah-like hillsides are grazed by herds of cattle. In large part this thesis is an attempt to develop what it means to be *Sahafatra*. However, since it is only in very rare circumstances that the clans comprising the people of *Sahafatra* form a unified whole it is important to be able to recognise and differentiate between the constituent parts. In the course of the thesis I hope to develop the individual character of several of these clans.

The clans most easily reached from *Vondrozo* (generally those falling within a 20 kilometre radius) will be the most prominently featured: *Tevongo, Masitafika, Vohilakatra, Antsoro, Tsaretry, Lohanosy, Antevatobe, Tesonjo, Hova*. Their proximity to the town in which I was based allowed me to visit them regularly, gradually building up a network of friends/informants over a fieldwork period of 16 months. *Vondrozo* acted as a magnet for them too and provided me with an opportunity to observe a different set of relationships and interactions taking place in a novel setting. These closest groups were not only selected as the central focus of the study as a matter of convenience; for reasons that will become apparent it became clear that they also form the core of what it is to be *Sahafatra*, being most active in the creation and maintenance of that identity. Several other groups fall under the *Sahafatra* umbrella but their allegiance to the uniting ideals is less concrete and less certain. They are: *Zafinivola, Antemanara, Hovalahy, Antemahatsinjobe*. These names play a peripheral but nevertheless important role in the collective entity.

The Big City

Vondrozo itself is not the subject of this study, but it is the backdrop against which many dramas are played out. Apart from being a stage for various performances *Vondrozo* is also a measuring stick against which people gauge their own lives in the countryside. To fully appreciate the importance of *Vondrozo* one must recognise the extremely limited knowledge the countryfolk have of the outside world. I specifically and repeatedly questioned people about the geography of Madagascar outside their local area and about the wider world beyond. Although some of the older generations had travelled within Madagascar to look for work in their youth, and others had even served in the French army during 2 World Wars the knowledge gleaned from these adventures was partial and disjointed. People might know the whereabouts of one or two important towns that they had once walked to but otherwise the picture was hazy.

In spite of this it is generally recognised that Madagascar is an island (this is what makes it such a complete cosmos for them); several friends might, in collaboration, even be able to construct a very approximate geography of Madagascar; but, although people have an image of a unified

homeland, individuals only have a fragmentary picture of its physical make-up. Madagascar itself is thought of as existing in glorious isolation and everything outside of it is thought of as part of France. For most rural people around *Vondrozo* this was the important dichotomy; you were either Malagasy or an outsider associated with France. French indoctrination was almost complete: on declaring that I was from England I was inevitably asked where that was in France. France is like an umbrella term encapsulating everything outside Madagascar. The consequence of this perception is that all foreigners are Frenchmen; even the Chinese and Indian traders are thought of as such. Foreigners [*vazaha*] in general whether they be French, Chinese or Indian tend to be perceived in the same way, as greedy and rich [cf Bloch 1971:30-32].

On a global scale a similar simplification takes place. Not surprisingly the fact that the earth is a rotating sphere hurtling through space is treated with disbelief; it simply doesn't fit into their perceived experience of the world. For people who spend their lives trying to anchor themselves successfully to the land it is disturbing and nonsensical to think of the earth as a movable object. Those who have not been taught otherwise at school choose to conceive of the earth as a flat plate, a far more culturally satisfying theory to them (even if one or two on reflection did worry about what would happen at the edge). The fact is that the majority of the rural population have never seen the sea which lies less than 70 kilometres to the east. For most of them *Vondrozo* (approximate population 1000) will be the largest town they see in their lives. So even if *Vondrozo* is just a messy, litter-strewn, overgrown outpost in the back of beyond, to many people it is the ultimate metropolis.

Size isn't everything

Vondrozo is not an important setting simply because it is the biggest. It is a market and administrative centre where people congregate and come into contact with the National Government albeit at a local level. In practical terms it is the place where you get your cattle ownership papers sorted; where the para-legal cattle protection co-operative [*Dina*] meets; where the government Tribunal for cases which cannot be solved by Customary Law [*didin-draza*] is held; where you visit the doctor in the hospital; where military selection takes place; where you

shop for all the household supplies you need; where you sell your cash crops and surplus rice etc. At the emotional and experiential level *Vondrozo* is the embodiment of an endless Saturday night; it is often where the action is; it is where young men come in search of a girlfriend or wife or a fight; it is where you come to drink on the quiet or eat rich food in a ‘*hotely*’ [small eating establishment] or be entertained; it is where you window shop and buy yourself treats; it may be where you visit a big church or where you give birth; it is where national celebrations take place, politicians speak, and you vote. Town is where you meet the people you would never have an excuse to see otherwise. It is regarded as different, dangerous and happening and people tend to love it.

History

Vondrozo is also full of echoes from the past. Historical associations relate it to the first recognised settlers and to the French and consequently it is thought of as a centre of power. The initial migrants, the *Tevongo*, are thought of (by all the clans) as the original ‘owners of the land’ [*tompontany*] by virtue of their early arrival [cf Lan 1985:14]. They staked their claim to the area by siting themselves on the highest point in the vicinity. They declared themselves to be the most senior of them all, honorifically calling themselves Grandfather [*iababe*] in relation to any newcomers. By selecting a location in the shadow of the forested escarpment out of which all the streams emerge they made a symbolic bid to corner the most vital resource: water. In an additional attempt to consolidate themselves the *Tevongo* placed the tomb of their greatest founding ancestor [*razam-be*], *Rabolobolo*, on a subsidiary hill not far away. This tomb now finds itself in the middle of *Vondrozo* in between the French-built Residence and the Gendarmerie.

The general theory of Malagasy power that those who control the dead have authority over the living has tremendous implications for this placement. The choice of the French to build their headquarters on this spot meant that they were in effect trying to appropriate the traditional seat of authority. Opinion differs as to whether they succeeded or not: some say it is self-evident that they did (because they were so dominant during the colonial period 1898-1960), others that they

did not (thereby explaining why they were eventually forced to leave after independence). Whatever the fact of the matter, while the French were present they radically remodelled inter-group relations and the landscape. The process of pacification (which took place approximately between 1895 and 1900) [Rafidison 1986:257-264; Deschamps 1936] involved not only subduing local chieftains, and persuading them by threats and punitive expeditions not to attack the French and to accept their authority; more significantly it involved playing clans off against one another ⁶, thereby weakening their unified resistance to the French ‘invaders’, before insisting on a more general peace, a sort of *Pax Sahafatra*, between clans [cf Cole 1996; Feeley-Harnik 1991b:115-133].

This policy was no simple matter to put into practice because the population was made up of very diverse and disparate groups [Gallieni 1908:267] ⁷: the French could broker and enforce short-term agreements but only the Malagasy themselves could create long-lasting solutions. Bullied, chivvied and manipulated ⁸ by the French they forged new ancestral contracts [*ziva*] ⁹, dynamic but irreversible joking relationships [*fanopa*] ¹⁰ that guaranteed peace for all time and altered forever the inter-group relations. Overnight, clans that had been fighting each other for decades became sworn allies. The French are recognised for having been major players at this genesis of a new way of life. It is legend, for example, that the *Masitafika* and *Vohilakatra* clans fought seven times before the French arrived and mended their differences [*infito ny ady ny Masitafika sy Vohilakatra, tonga ny vazaha da nanamboatra ny ady, tapitra*].

The plan to remould the land was equally ambitious. They built (with Malagasy labour) roads, erected bridges and laid down telegraph lines where there had been nothing before; they introduced coffee and the varieties of tree required to shade it; they taught people how to grow them and operated a cooperative to buy the produce; they introduced fruit trees to provide sweet nourishment and shade the rice-paddies; they built small dams to flood the valley-bottoms; they brought sugar cane and showed how to distil the crude rum now known as the ‘mother-of-all-alcohol’ [*endrin’i kalola*]; they mass planted eucalyptus trees to provide sustainable fuel-wood and prevent soil-erosion; they planted pines as windbreaks and for picnic spots; they built their Residence at the highest point on a strategic crossroads and even framed it with four towering palms as a silent demonstration of power, symmetry and grace.

What remains is not a full heritage but a residue and a reworking. The roads have deteriorated beyond recognition but are still major thoroughfares; the telegraph poles stand naked like carelessly hammered nails littered across the landscape but act as signposts to shortcuts away from the road; the eucalyptus, still a useful fuel source, lie butchered, twisted and burnt. The rest remains more-or-less as it was, a loose model for further development. But the French heritage that endures is continually diminishing. The general approach to land management of the French is so alien to the Malagasy that what once was is slightly disfigured and deformed each day. There is an ongoing wrestling match between the French heritage and the irresistible forces of Malgachicisation. The emergence of *Vondrozo* as a locality is symbolic of that struggle and lends a certain piquancy to wandering about the town today.

The name *Vondrozo* itself is a contentious issue. One version posits a French connection: when the French arrived they proceeded to prettify and domesticate their surroundings. One of the ways they did this was to plant beds of roses. Curious children would go and play in the European style gardens and would return home bearing trophies of rosebuds and flowers. The mystified parents would ask where they had got them from and the children replying literal-mindedly, utilising their newly learnt vocabulary, said: "*voany-d-rosy*", which means fruit-of-the-rose. By a slight transmogrification *Vondrozo* (or should it be Rosebud) came into being ¹¹. This 'Just So Story' has a rival. One of the *Tevongo* lineage names is *Antevondrozo*, which means those that come from *Vondrozo*. Since the *Tevongo* arrived first a definite confusion arises. The question is who borrowed the name from whom?

This competition for the rightful 'ownership' of *Vondrozo* is complicated by the fact that most people don't refer to the town by that name at all. '*Vondrozo*' represents both the town and the whole district [*fivondronana*] it administers and is therefore not a particularly accurate or specific term. Most people prefer to talk about '*LaPaositra*' which means the Post (Office) and obviously has French connotations [cf Feeley-Harnik 1991b:231-301 on being '*ampositra*', or at the post]; or they say they are going to *Ankadibe*, the name of the '*quartier*' holding the marketplace (the nucleus of the town). *Ankadibe*, which means the Big Ditch, is part of another group's arrival myth: the *Masitafika* say that one of their heroic ancestors stored his ill-gotten gains (slaves and cattle raided from neighbouring groups) here. The irony is that this place, The

Big Ditch, where the booty was stashed, is the modern-day source of good things: the marketplace. This enduring connection to the past means that the *Masitafika* (who have designs on becoming the most influential group themselves) can also lay claim to be 'owners' of the town.

The three-way competition (French, *Tevongo*, *Masitafika*) is constituted in the very make-up of the town. As people come to *Rabolobolo*'s tomb with offerings of money and rum [*minday toaka menamena na vola kidy*] to beg for healing [*mahajanga*] and blessing; as *Rabolobolo* himself reputedly walks the streets at night frightening folk with a noise like a crackling fire; as the French Residence remains standing proud; as the roses flower in profusion all year round; as the Big Ditch Marketplace swings into action, day-in and day-out; so is the drama played out.

A guided tour of *Vondrozo*-ville

The town itself comprises about 1000 people arranged around a crumbling core of official buildings centred on the crossroads; there is a marketplace, a town hall with an office for the Mayor, a hospital, a post office, 2 schools (and a Lycee not in operation), a gendarmerie (with barracks and a prison), a house for the deputy who sits on the National Assembly and an official 'residence' for the president of the local administration. Around and interspersed with this core are the private houses, most importantly the 3 Chinese owned shops, the Protestant and Catholic churches, 2 video salons and a few little 'hotely' [eating establishments] and roadside stalls. Most of the other houses are private homes strung out along the two roads in a sort of ribbon development. On the outskirts of town are a couple of satellite villages and scattered all around on little paths are various homesteads.

The official buildings tend to be built out of reinforced concrete, with tin roofs and are in a semi-dilapidated state; 2 of the shops are real tin shack affairs, consisting entirely of nailed-together corrugated iron sheets and planks [*rapaky*] made from the 'body' [*vata*] of a local type of palm tree [*ravinala*] while the third is a grand two-storey structure; the churches are serious edifices with towers and bells (the Catholic church even stretches to some stained-glass, an organ and a rose-garden) but both smell of rats, bats and decay; the ordinary houses tend to be of a mud-and-

wattle type construction with plastered walls and concrete surrounds with thatch or tin roofs while the houses on the periphery tend to be made entirely of '*rapaky*' planks. The outlying villages are built in the traditional style, all the components coming from the different parts of the Traveller's Palm [*ravinala* - see later for full description].

The inhabitants of the core area are of very diverse origins ranging from all over Madagascar. The resultant melange of functionaries, gendarmes, shop-workers, stall-workers, teachers, doctors, manual labourers, merchants, precious stone dealers etc never act as a corporate group. As outsiders to the region they look after their own interests first and foremost. Their key allegiance in *Vondrozo* is to their immediate family and an informal society of those heralding from the same point of origin - a sort of brotherhood of place. There is virtually no integration of these people into the life of the countryside. Even the forces of law and order are reluctant to go outside town. They only venture out if under direct orders to do so and then only unwillingly. As outsiders they have very little to gain and everything to lose (their lives, for example, when chasing armed cattle thieves) by involving themselves with the locals. They prefer to keep to themselves, maintaining a low profile until their tour of duty is over and they are re-posted.

The people who come to the town from far away merely for the purposes of work or a career are not committed to the region or the land in the same way as the locals. They distance themselves from this way of life thereby alienating the rural population. To an extent the urban population side-line themselves by their parochial outlook. They become invisible to the countryfolk only taking shape occasionally as obstacles to be negotiated. The other inhabitants, those more on the periphery, are coming from the opposite direction. They are ex-countryfolk who have moved into town. They tend to be better educated and wealthier than their rural 'cousins' but manage to keep a foot in both camps. They still farm the land but they also act as middlemen for produce and may run a small-scale business of their own. In a way they are the intermediaries that make more effective communication possible between the rural and the urban. Relatives and friends will always drop by and visit them, and assuming them to be more knowledgeable on certain 'city' matters, will often ask advice about how to go about such-and-such a procedure. Those people living in satellite villages are essentially country people; they could only ever be thought of as town-people because of their proximity to the centre.

Amenities: water, electricity, toilets

The amenities in the town are very limited. Despite the existence of stand-pipes there is no running water as the pump and water tank are in disrepair. Water is collected by women from a nearby well with plastic buckets on heads and in hands, while washing is done in the nearest stream about 200 yards away. In order to bathe most people have a favourite spot within a couple of kilometres which they frequent. The wealthier shopkeepers, on the other hand, send their lorries to the nearest pure water sources (rivers emerging from the forest about 10 kilometres away) and stock up on water which is stored in huge plastic barrels [*bidons*] to be used for cooking, showering etc

Electricity is supplied by an old generator which runs from 6 pm to about 9.30 pm each evening as long as there is no breakdown, enough petrol and no impending storm (in which case it is immediately shut down). Even when the generator is going the town remains remarkably dark as only about 20 houses are connected up and most of the bulbs in the street lamps are broken. The rest of the inhabitants use little oil-lamps made out of old concentrate of tomato tins with an oily rag as a wick. If there is a major event the organiser will try to beg or borrow one of the few 'Petromax' pressure lanterns circulating round the town. There are only about 5 WCs (long-drops) in *Vondrozo* and they are located in the shopkeepers compounds, the gendarmerie and the Residence. The rest of the population must take their chances in the daily dawn run into the coffee bushes or must take advantage of a journey outside town to enjoy the privacy of the wilds.

The wider picture: communications

Vondrozo, once a strategic staging post on the French engineered *Route Nationale 27* between the coast and the interior, is fast becoming a mouldering backwater in terms of trade and government. The traders and administrators complain about the lack of communication with the outside world: under the French they say they could leave after work, drive the 68 kilometres to the regional capital *Farafangana*, catch a film and still be back in time for the evening meal; under the French they could talk to their relatives by telephone anywhere on the island; under the

French they could drive into the interior in an ordinary Citroen car to take a picnic at the weekends; under the French the access routes for trade were open and bush-taxis and buses [auto-car] ran a regular service. But not any longer.

The road to the coast is virtually impassable even in a four-wheel drive vehicle; any journey requires a team of several 'boys' (helpers who are in fact grown men) to help dig the vehicle out of the worst quagmires and to literally rebuild the bridges where the wooden supports have rotted, been broken or been stolen for a bit of house construction. Even then the 68 kilometres journey is likely to take about 9 hours. The road into the interior is a deceptively good dirt road for 13 kilometres; then it rapidly deteriorates as it enters the forest until it finally peters out into an overgrown path a few miles further on. It is impossible to ride a bicycle on this old *Route Nationale* let alone drive a 6 tonne lorry up it.

As for the telephones, they have been out of action for years. The telegraph poles remain standing lopsidedly but the lines are long gone; either brought down by a cyclone or pilfered to make washing lines in a nearby villages. Telephone bills are still delivered for line rental and the ten or so phone owners in the town still pay them in the hope that one day they will be reconnected; but the only sign of hope is the continual arrival of the rather slim island-wide directory with their names in it like a never-ending bad joke. The only service actually in operation is a 2-way radio at the Post Office and the Gendarmerie to be used in cases of emergency. The post still goes but is unreliable and time consuming. A courier departs on foot once a week to deliver mail to the sorting office in *Farafangana*, 68 kilometres away. This journey takes at least two days each way and can take considerably longer if the courier is waylaid or decides to visit family members along the way.

Despite this isolation (or perhaps in certain measure because of it) *Vondrozo* remains a central focus for the local populace. It is as if as the outside world recedes the local clans attempt to reclaim what they feel is rightfully theirs. None of the surrounding clans have a dominant influence in the town so it has become a neutral no-mans land, a convenient arena for low-key competition. People ostensibly come to go to the market and the shops, but they also come to see and be seen. Men in particular like to show off and march about self-importantly, bagging

key positions around the central thoroughfare and greeting everyone in sight; women like to wear their smartest clothes and gravitate towards the market and shops to catch up on the latest news. Everybody is lively in town. It is a place full of energy; a place to relive past victories and dream about/plot future ones. Nevertheless, however much pleasure is taken from visiting town, the town remains as a distraction, a diversion from and contrast to the nitty-gritty of everyday life. The *Sahafatra* may share a common metropolis but what really bonds them is the way they see the land that stretches away forever outside the city precincts.

An introduction to the land

The land under discussion falls approximately into a rectangle, 40 km east-west by 60 km north-south. A combination of natural barriers, political/administrative boundaries and 'ethnic' shifts help to contribute to the demarcation of the rather amorphous borders of the land of *Sahafatra*. Perceptions of the surrounding groups are key to their understanding of their situation, an understanding based as much on perceived culture/character contrasts as on geography.

Marking the western limit of the land of *Sahafatra* is the rippling blue streak of the steep, thickly-forested 500 metre high escarpment. Except for a few unclear paths and timber camps (manned by itinerant *Betsileo*) it is largely impenetrable and uninhabited. It runs unerringly north-south, like a massive handrail that you can always orientate yourself by. Beyond that, or behind the forest [*ambadika ala*] as they like to say, are the *Bara*, famed for their obsessive love of cattle and their incestuous marriages ¹² [cf Elli 1993:74-81; Huntington 1978;1988]. The *Bara* are cow fetishists [*tia aomby loatra*], rustlers par excellence and, as far as the people of *Sahafatra* are concerned, are not to be trusted [*tsy azo atokisa*].

To the north is what appears to be a solid wall of rock often topped with clouds. This marks *Tanala* country, where those known as 'the people of the forest' lie hidden away in their mountain fastness. The terrain here is particularly difficult as are the inhabitants who are known for their potent charms and magic, and who are said to travel with their spirit familiars [cf Beaujard 1983b] ¹³.

To the east is a deserted strip of land famed for its barrenness. It is an 'empty quarter' frequented by convicted criminals who are ordered by the prison service to grow their own food or starve, but who in fact take advantage of their freedom to rob, rape and kill travellers. Further east are the *Zafisoro* and the *Antaifasy*, warring rivals for the rich soil of the river basins and coastal plain.

To the south the land opens out until it reaches the *Mananara* river. As one travels in this direction the idea of *Sahafatra* gradually dissolves away until no-one recognises the term at all and a replacement *Antaisaka* identity takes over. The numberless hordes of *Antaisaka* [cf Deschamps 1936; 1938] ancestries to the immediate south strike fear into the hearts of the people of *Sahafatra* who are wary of being swallowed up and engulfed by their powerful neighbours.

As one can readily imagine from the above description to be *Sahafatra* is in part to experience and struggle against the inevitable feeling of being threatened and boxed-in by one's neighbours. Containment by other groups dictates the nature of the arena they will live in and fight over. In one sense it promotes a sense of unity and co-operation (us versus the rest of the world) while in another it generates animosity and antipathy (competition over limited resources). This duality is very apparent in the *Sahafatra* character: one moment members of different clans will be fondly calling each other 'brothers' [*ampirahalahy*] and the next they will be bad-mouthing each other behind each others backs over some perceived slight or minor injustice ¹⁴.

A view from on high

The land of *Sahafatra* is an expanse of deceptively small-looking hills. Seen from on high their curvaceous geometry gives the impression of an endless sea of overturned egg-cartons. The hills are mostly bare and their untouched smoothness gives a virgin quality to the land. From a distance you would still think that no-one lived down there. On closer inspection the impact of human habitation becomes visible: maybe a patch of burnt and cleared scrub, a whiff and thread of smoke, a tuft of trees on top of a ridge where a village is growing up, the lurid green flash of a rice-paddy, a certain unnatural symmetry on the hillside where the manioc is planted, the red

line of trodden earth where a footpath contours the valley, the mixed hues of a man-made coffee forest stretching along a ridge, or a thin voice carried on the wind.

When you know what to look for other features become apparent: the precise location of villages hidden in the trees, the standing stones astride a ridge, the tombs under the desolate outcrops of rock. By understanding the relative positioning of certain features one can begin to read the land. Men and women are gradually taking possession of the land, but so far they have only managed to scratch the surface. They talk about the land as ‘still being young’ [*mbola tanora*] and ‘unformed’ [*mbola tsy namboarana*]. They themselves, as people of the south-east, are referred to as ‘the many who are not yet tired’ [*betsirebaka*] because they are thought of as youthful pioneers in a ‘new land’ [*tany vaovao*]. In effect then, as an outsider, one is starting to learn to read a land which is itself still largely unwritten.

.....

Homesteading

The land around *Vondrozo* is famous for being fertile, consisting mainly of a sticky, heavy, bright red soil that turns to glue at the first sign of rain. It is this prize stuff that everyone is competing for. In theory the land is open to anyone, encouraging settlers to take advantage of the optimum farming conditions and spread across the land. In practice the land is divided into loosely recognised territories with extremely fuzzy borders: in the case of outsiders coming in they must ask the permission of the proprietorial clan.

Most of the expansion is thus undertaken by the members of the individual sovereign clans themselves radiating out from well-established nuclei. This is seen as the most natural course of development as they attempt to fill their space, gently pushing and probing at the frontiers of their neighbours. There is no fixed pattern to the outward movement; rather it depends on an uncoordinated set of personal decisions as grown up sons leave their natal villages in search of independence and glory. Some may be nervous and will choose the nearest hill to build their homestead while others will be more adventurous and will wander further afield into what they would regard as uncharted and dangerous territory.

The further one goes into the back-of-beyond, the more one is '*ambanivolo*' [cf Thomas 1996:41] which literally means underneath the bamboo. What this expression conveys is the wildness and loneliness of certain areas where the landscape is still in a savage state untouched by human hand; where the hills are overgrown with scrubby bamboo like tangled, trifid-like hair, where there are no paths, paddies, villages or people. The waste of such a place is like that of an unkempt and uncared for beard covering a potentially beautiful face. The man who chooses to come here pits himself against the elements in a bid to carve out a place and a name for himself.

The activity of opening up the land is known as 'beginning to make the land living' [*manomboka mamelona tany*] and requires courage, skill, luck and patience. The process aims at the creation of a special type of landscape. Eventually there should be a noisy and bustling village full of your descendants [*tsy maintsy misy maresaka an tana, tsy maintsy misy taranaka*]; it should be situated on the top of a hill or astride a ridge; it should be shaded by a variety of fruit trees and have banana plants and manioc plots within easy reach of the perimeter; there should be a cattle pen [*valan-aomby*] full of your family's cows; there should be staircases and amphitheatres of terraced rice-paddies [*tani-kosy*] in the surrounding valleys; there should be a scattering of mango trees to shade these paddies; there should be extensive and productive coffee groves shaded by a man-made forest of '*bonara*' [from French 'bois noir'] and '*alobisia*' [from French scientific name 'alubisia'] trees surrounding and hiding the village; and there should be at least one Big House [*trano-be*] to act as a ritual and practical centre of operations.

The challenge is a considerable one and not everyone succeeds. Much depends on the security of the area; so much so that during periods of particularly rapacious banditry there is a rapid contraction of outlying homesteads. Settlement patterns are constantly changing according to the external circumstances and the outlook of individual groups. It is the sense of insecurity and impermanence that creates the dynamic tension between the desire to face up to the challenge, to become accustomed to a new place and the homesickness that draws you back to the place you set out from.

Setting up a homestead is not simply a case of overcoming practical problems; it involves being able to handle psychological challenges as well. Homesickness itself, for example, is a highly



The loneliness of an isolated homestead and the hustle and bustle of town

culturally elaborated concept. We were forever being asked if we were ‘settled in’ [*efa zatra*], ‘accustomed’ [*tama*], or a bit ‘homesick’ [*manimani*]. Although it was a subject to laugh about there was a serious side to the questioning as people freely recognised that it took great strength of character to endure the process of becoming accustomed to a new place. Often after a long journey they would themselves tell of their desperation to get home to where everything was familiar, where they were not ‘stared at as strangers’ [*sambaitany*] and where the land was known rather than threatening. They would talk of the loneliness of an isolated homestead [*mangina loatra ny kombohitra*], and of their fear of ‘strange forces’ [*tamberitany*] in the woods that could trap and incapacitate a man walking alone.

To appreciate what a feat it is to set up a new homestead it is necessary to understand the intensely nervous disposition of most of the people of *Sahafatra*. People are not merely afraid of recognised dangers they are also fearful of the unknown. This aspect of their character is graphically illustrated by their fear of the dark. One should never visit after night has fallen and if you do you are likely to find a tightly sealed house with all the family inside, extremely unwilling to unlock the door and let you in. It is simply not regarded as normal or sensible to venture outside after dark. If for some reason one is forced to (there has to be a very good reason), one should go in numbers carrying powerful torches ¹⁵.

It is clear then that intangible as well as tangible dangers encourage people to stick together and stay put. And yet, in spite of this, people are still driven to strike out on their own. It is this inherent tension between fear and ambition that creates the implicit challenge, the facing up to of which is, in large part, what to be *Sahafatra* is all about. Strong leaders are never afraid [*ttsy matahotra panjaka*].

Endnotes

1. I follow Bloch and Parry's definition of 'fertility' as 'fecundity' or 'productiveness' [Bloch & Parry 1982:7].

2. "Ritual regicide - killing the king to save the kingship - is inscribed in the logic of this type of politico-religious institution" [Adler 1982:181].

3. This involves "inserting a local notion of the person" rather than "importing a putatively global one" [Errington 1989: 5].

4. By talking of 'layering' and the different characteristics associated with different 'layers' I hope to deal with the problem of reconciling "the study of meaning with the study of 'politics'" [Errington 1989:5].

5. "The logic of a hierarchical system does not admit the possibility of exact peers in status. Yet people who are close in status are effectively status-peers. Neither is willing to admit the superiority of the other. As a result, their relation is unstable and inconclusive, characterized by competition and opposition rather than by unity and solidarity. It approaches a contest in its structure and meaning" [Errington 1989:141].

6. See Rafidison [1986:261] "A cause de l'insuffisance du personnel europeen pour la mainmise total, la collaboration des autochtones a ete sollicitée.... Les Français ont récupéré la hiérarchie sociale traditionnelle tout en jouant sur les oppositions claniques et les oppositions sociales dans le but de créer une brèche dans un éventuel front uni de résistance à la colonisation."

7. See Gallieni [1908:267]: "C'est surtout dans cette partie de l'Ile [the south-east] qu'on pouvait constater la difficulté de prendre à Madagascar des mesures administratives d'ensemble et d'adopter un système unique d'exercice de notre souveraineté vis-à-vis de populations essentiellement différentes par leurs traditions, leurs caractères et leurs aptitudes à la civilisation. A l'inverse du pays sakalava où notre action pourrait s'appuyer sur l'autorité des chefs traditionnels, nous nous trouvons là en présence de peuplades à l'état d'extrême division."

8. See Rafidison [1986:261] "Les mesures répressives ne suffisent pas à aplanir la situation. La pratique de l'espionnage a été également érigée en système. Les tournées de reconnaissance de chaque nouvelle région pénétrée et conquise sont fréquentes. Les études ethnologiques abondent dans ce sens. Nous ne retiendrons ici que le rapport ethnographique sur les races de Madagascar établi par Berthier. Ces enquêtes ethnologiques ont pour but de connaître les populations pour les soumettre. Ici encore les renseignements ne se limitant pas à la connaissance de l'histoire de chaque groupe on cherche à mettre en exergue les anciennes alliances, à déceler les relations de parenté entre les chefs soumis et les chefs rebelles."

9. A 'ziva' is a pact between clans that promises solidarity, mutual assistance and perpetual peace. It is therefore meant to be impossible for the clans who have sworn themselves to this relationship to war with each other. Anyone who breaks the treaty will face sanctions administered by an omniscient divine force found in the 'environment' known as 'Zanahary'. Networks of 'ziva' relations [*piziva*] increase social cohesion and make it safe to travel without fear of attack in what was previously 'enemy' territory.

10. The '*fanopa*' is the mechanism through which 'ziva' work. People implicated in a 'ziva' relationship '*mifanopa*': this means that they can curse each other as much as they like as long as they do not actually come to blows [*mahazo miteny ratsy fa teny avao; tsy mahazo miady*].

11. *Nisy toera iray feno voninkazo nambolena vazaha taloha. Nihira tany ny ankizy da naka ny voninkazo. Nanontany ny iaba sy ny endriny -La taia anareo?- -Nandeha naka ny voany-d-rosy-. Taty aoriana da lasa tena anara tana raikitra ny ozy -Vondrozo-*.

12. It is generally thought that the *Bara* favour marriage with a first cousin which is unacceptably close [*mifankariny loatra*] for the *Sahafatra* who think that only at least third generation descendants of brothers/sisters should marry. Anything closer than this is thought of as incestuous and is referred to as a *Bara* marriage [*fanambadia Bara*]. Even if the third generation rule is satisfied a '*fafy*' [atonement] to remove the danger of any perceived incest should, ideally, be completed. Marriage of third generation descendants is known as '*mifamala*' which literally means to be separate from each other. This is why they can safely marry. However, such a marriage is also known as '*misaviky*' which means to seize strongly with the arms, to cling on to, and as '*mifampasaky*' which means to search for each other with the hand. The two contrasting types of terminology demonstrate the fine balance between keeping kin apart and holding them together. The *Sahafatra* ideal seems to involve expansion tied to security.

13. In *Tanala* country you find many unmanned stalls beside paths; this strange and untypical arrangement is only possible because their magic powers are held in such fear that everyone leaves the correct money anyway.

14. Deschamps and Vianes also record such 'duality': "Les groupes Sahafatra luttèrent entre eux à l'occasion, surtout pour se voler des boeufs. Mais ils étaient tous d'accord contre les Bara d'Ivohibe qui venaient prendre des esclaves chez eux, et réciproquement. Ils luttèrent aussi contre leurs voisins de l'Est, Sahavoai, Zaramanampi, Zarafaniliha" [Deschamps/Vianes 1959:84].

15. The essential role of the torch was made plain to me after I heard several long and serious discussions on the merits of various types of torch and batteries held by those wanting to be well prepared for any unavoidable night-time sorties.

Part I: a culture of testing

Part I of the thesis introduces the people and the land and gradually develops the idea of a ‘culture of testing’ as an alternative to descent, showing that ‘rulers’ can rule over people who are not their biological progeny by passing through a demanding ceremonial procedure designed to prove their worthiness. Chapter 1 discusses the diverse origins and current social organisation of the people of *Sahafatra*; Chapter 2 describes the hierarchical authority system that they hold in common; Chapter 3 illustrates the connection between a leader’s realm of authority and the selection procedure used to choose him; Chapter 4 describes and analyses the testing process that must be undergone to become a senior leader; Chapter 5 shows how by passing certain tests a ruler comes to be regarded as potent.

Chapter 1

Defining the field of research: what is *Sahafatra*?

Literature

There is almost no literature directly relating to the people or land of *Sahafatra*. In pre-colonial times (ie pre the 1898 French take-over) the area was largely avoided by potential authors as it was reputed to be very dangerous, lying as it did outside the control of the dominant pre-colonial power, the *Merina* state¹. This means that most accounts from that time tend to be peripheral or based on hearsay rather than real experience². Missionaries and explorers in the vicinity simply travelled from *Merina* fort to *Merina* fort³, often with an armed escort, in order to avoid the bandits and rebels endemic to the region⁴.

After the French conquest and the prolonged troubles involved in pacifying the region, the area became somewhat of a backwater as it was of no particular commercial interest [Rafidison 1986; Deschamps/Vianes 1959:85]; consequently no detailed accounts of the area were published. Today the people of *Sahafatra* are still largely unknown both in academic circles and in Madagascar as a whole⁵. Even in the regional capitals *Farafangana* and *Vangaindrano* (which are only 70 km away) the people of *Sahafatra* are, for the main part, unheard of. On the national stage they appear to be completely insignificant. So who are the people of *Sahafatra*?

The people of *Sahafatra*

On the surface it appears that the people of *Sahafatra* are a purely geographical ensemble formed from groups with very different ethnic origins, who do not mix and who have precise frontiers and distinct traditions [Deschamps/Vianes 1959:84]. This idea is reinforced by the continued in-fighting and cattle-raising between groups, and by the lack of any major urban concentrations

(*Vondrozo* itself, the administrative centre, has only about 1000 inhabitants), a situation resulting from the independent and territorial nature of the clans [Deschamps/Vianes 1959:84]. From the outsiders point of view the land of *Sahafatra* is a realm of identity confusion, a patchwork collection of disparate groups [Marchand 1901:481] ⁶ claiming diverse origins. It was the despair of colonial administrators searching for any means of indirect rule [Gallièni 1908:267] through which to administer their ‘politique des races’⁷. However, despite appearances to the contrary, the idea of *Sahafatra* as a land and a people has been around for a long time. The land of *Sahafatra* has existed as a roughly bounded region for over 170 years ⁸ and despite repeated attempts at colonisation by the *Merina* ⁹ and successful ‘occupation’ by the French, still regards itself as ‘sovereign’ territory.

What is most important is that those who now regard themselves as *Sahafatra* regard themselves as an encapsulated people and express fierce independence from the surrounding groups. They say that they are not the same [*tsy mitovy*] as the neighbouring *Bara*, *Tanala*, *Betsileo*, *Antaimoro*, *Antaisaka*, *Antaifasy*, or *Zafisoro* groups, but different [*fa hafa da hafa*]. Although the people of *Sahafatra* do not have a very high degree of inter-clan communal organisation they do display a remarkable coherence in terms of lifestyle and cultural values. It is this that keeps the term alive and averts the potential total identity confusion. People who think of themselves as *Sahafatra* share loyalty to an idea without being exactly clear as to what that idea comprises ¹⁰. Adoption of the term *Sahafatra* expresses the fact that the constituent groups feel they have more in common with each other than with those external groups encircling them. As we shall see later, the most important feature they feel they share is an attachment to a common type of land and to an authority system which is informed by their relationship with that land and the other constituent groups inhabiting it.

Evolution of the term *Sahafatra*

The term *Sahafatra* has not consistently signified a single clear entity; what it has represented has changed over time. It is important to understand the historical development of the term in order to fully appreciate the present-day connotations of what it is to be *Sahafatra*. The first

recorded mention of *Sahafatra* was made by Leguevel de Lacombe in his book “Voyage a Madagascar et aux Iles Comores (1823-30) published in Paris in 1840. To him the ‘Chaffattes’ [*Sahafatra*] were a savage, miserably dressed people, who lived in clusters of ramshackle huts, and farmed the poor soil of the hills. Most of his account is taken up describing how he had little opportunity to talk to them as they fled on hearing of his arrival. His alien white features and the fact that he was riding a strange beast (his horse) was enough to terrify the locals, who, he discovered, had a prophecy that they would be destroyed by such a man [Leguevel de Lacombe 1840:238-243] ¹¹ .

His encounter was almost certainly a part of the *Merina* campaign attempting to pacify the region. In this case the *Merina* armies advanced as far as the mountain *Madiorano*, overshadowing *Vondrozo*, before they were repulsed by *Sahafatra* warriors. There were two other *Merina* military expeditions that succeeded in setting up military posts and capturing slaves. Yet in spite of these attempts at colonisation the people of *Sahafatra* retained their independence [Deschamps/Vianes 1959:84] ¹² . This effective resistance to the might of the *Merina* state suggests that over 170 years ago there was some form of political organisation coherent enough to group and co-ordinate the forces in the region.

Political entity or environmental label: the confusion between land and people

Despite the evidence for a political as well as a social/geographical grouping as early as 1820 it seems likely that this first identification of ‘the *Sahafatra*’ is somewhat flawed. The reason for this lies in the name *Sahafatra* itself. *Sahafatra* is literally a description of a type of landscape not the sort of name you give to a people. According to the Abinal/Malzac Dictionnaire Malgache-Francais ‘*saha*’ means ‘la campagne’ [the country] or ‘les champs’ [the fields] and ‘*fatra (na)*’ means ‘un espace decouvert, denude dans la foret ou au dela de la foret’ [a clear space in or beside the forest]. Thus *Sahafatra* essentially denotes a clear space, an empty valley or an uncultivated area near to, or in, a forest ¹³ .

When we asked people to explain the meaning of the word now, they gave a variety of answers¹⁴

(there is no single story/legend) but often spoke of the word as meaning a place where, in the past, there was no food [*tsy'sy hany*]. This fits in with the basic dictionary definition of an undeveloped area ¹⁵ and belies the clear-cut existence of a 'people'. This view is strengthened by the fact that according to current oral histories the ancestors of the present-day inhabitants only migrated to the area about 7 generations ago ¹⁶. In addition all the clans claim to have come from different directions ¹⁷. It seems very unlikely that there was enough time for these diverse groups of migrants to come together to form a sustainable political grouping before the campaign of which Lacombe was part arrived on the scene. The resistance of the people to the *Merina* should most probably be put down to a temporary and fragile alliance.

It seems, therefore, most probable that Lacombe confused the people with the land. His use of the term *Sahafatra* may be an early instance of labelling a people with the name of the type of ecological niche they inhabit [cf Eggert 1986]. What he failed to recognise was that although the land was classified as being of one type, the inhabitants were of many different types. The fact that people who share a common environment eventually come to feel connected to each other in some way is a later development that I will explore shortly ¹⁸.

The French colonial interpretation

When the French colonial forces arrived they did not make the same mistake. The initial maps made when the French first arrived (from 1895 onwards) don't recognise the existence of a separate group known as *Sahafatra*; instead all the individual clans are listed. Marchand's article "Les Habitants de la Province de *Farafangana*" [Marchand 1901] lists many of the clans currently in the area and provides a reasonably accurate map of their relative locations ¹⁹. Later, when more ethnographic data had been collected, the supposed origins of each clan and their 'ethnic' affiliation to one of the larger recognised cultural groupings were added to such maps. The region was thus artificially and conceptually split by the French. They used maps incorporating detailed pie charts to signify how (in their minds) the territory was divided between *Tanala*, *Antaisaka*, *Bara* and even *Antandroy* groups ²⁰.

Even later the French colonials coined the term *Bara-Sahafatra* (a term some of the people reportedly applied to themselves [Deschamps/Vianes 1959:83]) to denote the clans in the vicinity of *Vondrozo*. They belatedly seem to have acknowledged and accepted that there was a major difference between *Tanala* to the north and *Bara-Sahafatra* to the south. *Bara-Sahafatra* is a term that older people still often use to refer to themselves although the history surrounding the label has become fuzzy. The term essentially recognises that many of the constituent groups of the people of *Sahafatra* are thought to herald from *Bara*-land to the west but that a new, non-*Bara*, local identity has been forged also, transforming old allegiances.

I have the impression that the French, having acknowledged the fact that the people around *Vondrozo* did not fit into the already demarcated ethnic groups, resuscitated the already existing term '*Sahafatra*' for their own ends, in order to help pacify the region. According to clan-leaders themselves the area was strife-torn with inter-clan fighting before the arrival of the French. The French forced peace by various means: they moved isolated and high villages to lower ground, closer to *Vondrozo* and the major access routes²¹; they took the highest point in *Vondrozo* from the *Tevongo* to show who was boss; some say that they even introduced aspects of what is now considered 'custom' [*fomba*] for the *Sahafatra*. Regrouping the disparate clans under the one label, *Sahafatra*, may have been another strategy to impose their domination.

Whatever the motive, the re-introduction of the term was so successful, that by the time Deschamps and Vianes conducted their survey of the area in 1959, the other contending terms had been completely displaced. They confidently referred to '*les Sahafatra*' [Deschamps/Vianes 1959:83] and drew up the most accurate and complete map of all the clans that constitute the people of *Sahafatra*, that exists to date. Their map clearly demarcated a *Sahafatra* territory for the first time, thereby initiating the creation of an independent *Sahafatra* identity. The end result was that the people of the administrative district of *Vondrozo* began to think of themselves as *Sahafatra* in some sense.

Contemporary usage is more complex as people use the term *Sahafatra* to denote the land or the people interchangeably. The distinction between the two uses has become less relevant as the people become more associated with the land and with each other. The label has in a sense

become active; now the people use it emphasise the connection between the people and the land and to appeal for unity among the constituent groups. Thus in an inter-clan debate speakers wishing to encourage honourable and reasonable behaviour from all the participants might talk of 'we *Sahafatra*' [*atsika Sahafatra*] in the same breath as alluding to 'our land of *Sahafatra*' [*tanintsika Sahafatra*]. What was initially a description of the landscape has become a political tool [cf Deschamps 1936:205-206] to be used as and when it suits.

***Sahafatra* as a corporate group**

The people of *Sahafatra* are considered by some locally to be the 19th, as yet unrecognised, official group (there are 18 official tribes in Madagascar). The fact that a local para-legal law enforcement system [*Dina*] has been created, known as the *Dina* of the *Sahafatra*, has firmed up this idea of *Sahafatra* as a corporate group. The *Dina* is a local system of administering justice in which local groups have taken the business of catching and judging 'criminals' into their own hands. *Dinas* have enormous sway all across central and south Madagascar because these are areas where cattle-rustling is rife. They have become a particularly significant focus for country people in the current climate of insecurity.

Cattle-theft is a major preoccupation for people and we would often be woken up in the middle of the night by alarm calls and the stampede of thundering feet as people set off in pursuit of stolen cattle. The creation of the *Sahafatra Dina* in 1989 to counter this problem has put *Sahafatra* on the map, so to speak. The profile of *Sahafatra* as a grouping has been raised as far as outsiders are concerned. This new conception of what goes to make-up *Sahafatra* was concretised when a commemorative stone painted with the names of the constituent member groups [*firaisa*] was erected for the *Dina* in the village of *Analavaky* [clan *Masitafika*], near *Vondrozo*, in 1996. Membership of the *Dina* of the *Sahafatra* has, however, also confused matters because it does not tally accurately with the traditional conception of the groups that go to make up *Sahafatra*. Traditionally it was the groups living in the administrative district of *Vondrozo*, close to *Vondrozo*, who most strongly thought of themselves as *Sahafatra*. Peripheral clans who lived far from *Vondrozo* or in proximity to other groups eg *Tanala*, *Antaisaka*, were

variously included/excluded. These peripheral groups tended to look to different administrative centres eg *Vohimary*, *Mahazoarivo*, *Karianga*, *Mahatsinjo* and *Mahatsinjobe*.

Dinas, though, are like pressure groups and do not respect traditional formulae; they try to attract as many member groups as possible (wherever they may come from) in order to make themselves more powerful. They are not concerned about cross-cutting traditional allegiances. The result of this is twofold: 1) groups that positively assert they are *Sahafatra* (eg the *Tsaretry* clan) can and do actually choose to become members of a different *Dina* (eg the *Dina* of the *Tanilo*) because its policies are thought to be better (in the sense that it is perceived to act more brutally towards criminals); 2) groups that have nothing to do with *Sahafatra* can and do join the *Dina* of the *Sahafatra* for comparable reasons. Consequently there is no direct correlation between *Dina* membership and enduring association with the land or people of *Sahafatra*. The groups traditionally regarded as *Sahafatra* do form the core of the *Dina* of the *Sahafatra* but they are not its sole constituents.

To sum-up then: despite its malleable nature and uncertain origins, despite the fact that it is sometimes remembered and sometimes forgotten, the term *Sahafatra* still appears meaningful. It denotes a loose confederation of groups²² centred around *Vondrozo*, the territory they inhabit, and the particular environmental nature of that territory. This literal definition is combined with a sense of historical involvement between the clans which is felt to be important. Although there is no consistent, uniting history shared by all the people of *Sahafatra*, the most critical and emotive episodes of the past are held in common: all the people know that their ancestors were migrants to the area; they all know that the clans fought one another over the land; and they all know that a permanent truce was called explaining why they now live side-by-side as neighbours, wet-rice farming in relative peace.

So even though people may prioritise a local identity (family, house-group, clan) over a regional one (such as that belonging to the term *Sahafatra*) [cf Covell 1987; Eggert 1981] the term *Sahafatra* retains relevance²³. It is resonant for local people because it conjures up a particular shared way of life [cf Thomas 1996:23], and a peculiar shared history, both of which they value. Currently the local actors are very much emphasising their *Sahafatra* identity. It is worth

remembering that people will say that they are *Sahafatra* even though it becomes evident on further questioning that they have no precise notion of what this means historically or geographically. To an extent then we must accept that people are *Sahafatra* just because they say they are, because they feel themselves to be members of a set of clans without exactly knowing why. At present the term is undergoing a renaissance as national government loses relevance and local means of maintaining order increase in importance. The continuing collapse of colonial means of government (roads, telephones etc) means that hinterlands are largely ignored and have to come up with their own means of governance [cf Cole 1996]. Hence the rise of *Dinas* and the promotion of a heightened *Sahafatra* identity, graphically illustrated by the painting of the words '*Tranom-pokonolona Sahafatra*' [*Sahafatra* Council Chamber] on the run down meeting hall in *Vondrozo* in 1996.

The Clans

Having accepted that the definition is not entirely coherent, one could say that there are about 13 clans that fall under the term *Sahafatra*. By clan I mean an aggregation of people claiming descent from (or affiliation to) a single founding ancestor. These clans are:

Tevongo; Masitafika; Vohilakatra; Antsoro; Tsaretry; Tesonjo; Antevatobe; Lohanosy; Hova; Hovalahy; Zafinivola; Antemanara; Antemahatsinjobe.

The clans are arranged into a loosely defined patchwork of neighbouring territories centred around the town of *Vondrozo*. By territory I mean the area exclusively inhabited by one clan where, due to its uncontested dominance, the members of that clan have the right to govern themselves and call themselves 'owners of the land' [*tompontany*].

It is generally acknowledged that the *Tevongo* arrived in the area first and are therefore considered to be the most senior group. The head of the *Tevongo* clan is thus in theory the most significant individual in the region. In practice however, not only are there few occasions when his rank can be called upon, other groups will also contest his right to exercise this seniority. The

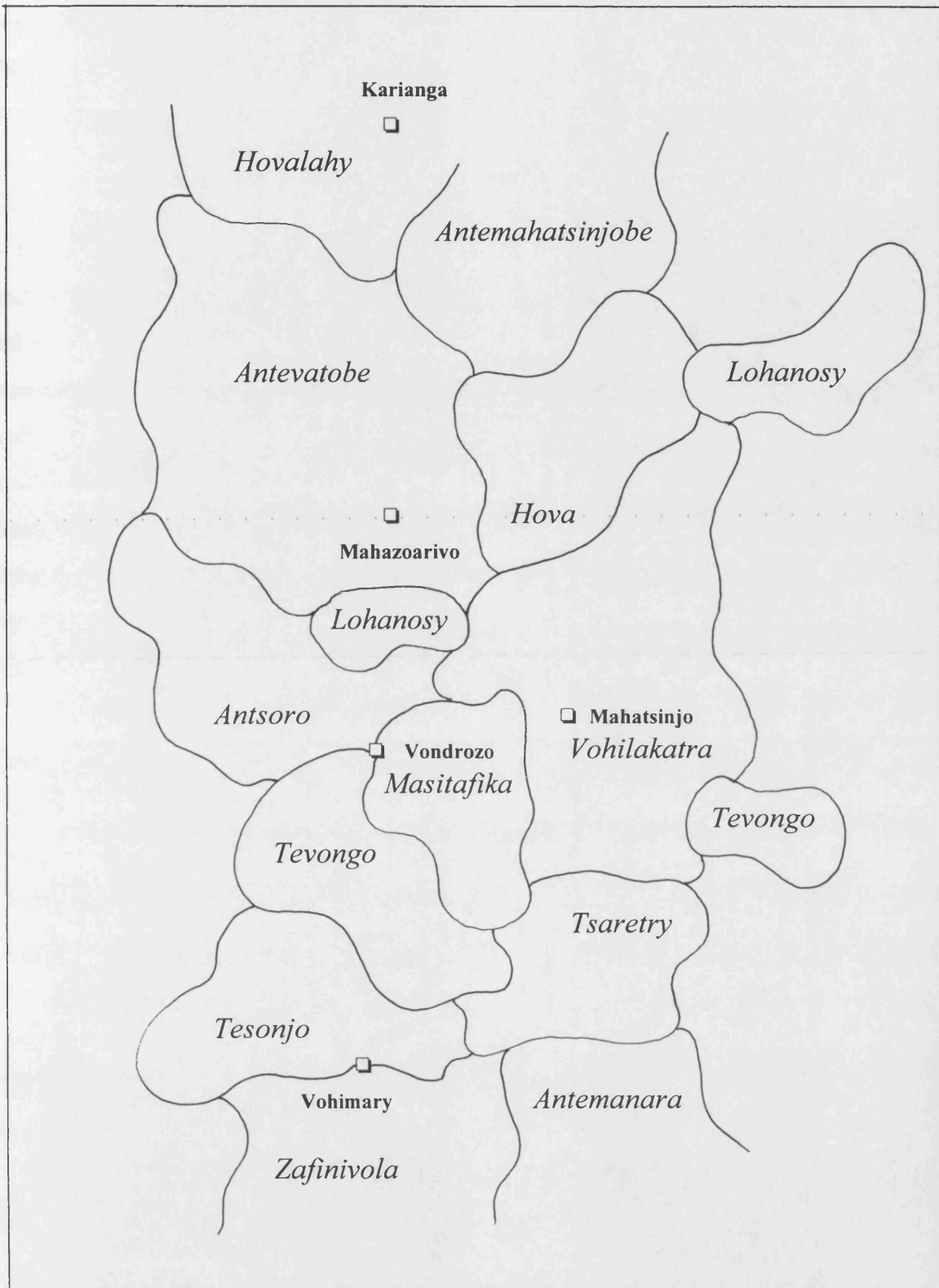


Figure 3: clan territories and administrative centres of Sahafatra

blessing of the new hospital for *Vondrozo* became a highly contentious matter, with the *Masitafika* arguing that geographically *Vondrozo* was their territory and it was therefore their right to administer the blessing. The *Tevongo* argued in turn that since all the clans were going to use the facilities, they should be allowed to act as representatives for the sum of all the clans.

The matter was further complicated by the fact that it was not universally agreed who the head of the *Tevongo* clan was. Having met and talked to the elderly man whom a number of people had named as the head (and shown the respect due to him by giving the requisite bottle of sweet red wine), I was surprised to be told by members of another clan that there was a rival *Tevongo* candidate who also claimed to be the leader. The lack of public duties associated with the role had allowed this confusion to arise as there had been few occasions when this leader could exercise his perceived authority. When the old man died a new candidate turned up at my house announcing himself to be the one and only successor. The irony of this whole episode was that the hospital, even though it was finished, was never finally blessed by anybody. In fact during my stay the hospital was never used as such because, much to the chagrin of the local populace, it was commandeered by the mayor as an office.

The controversy over the hospital led to discussions about the nature of the relationship between the *Tevongo* and the rest of the clans. *Tatahira* (a *Masitafika* man) contested that although the *Tevongo* were, as the first inhabitants, ritual owners of the land, the subsequent incomers had autonomy within their perceived territory. Thus, while the other clans didn't dispute the *Tevongo*'s symbolic seniority [*voaloha ny Tevongo; zokin-olo ny Tevongo*] they considered their own affairs to be beyond the *Tevongo*'s jurisdiction. This was defined for me by *Tatahira*, who said that the *Tevongo* ruled 'the land' (all the territories falling within 'the land') but that each clan ruled the territory defined by its own tributary [*vava-rano*]. The de facto situation is that, by and large, clans run their own affairs.

The relationship between the clans is far from straightforward however. It is widely acknowledged that inter-clan warfare was only brought to an end when the French arrived in the region at the turn of the century. The *Masitafika* and *Vohilakatra*, for example, were said to have fought seven times before the 'foreigners' mended it, and made it stop [*infito ny ady ny*

Masitafika sy Vohilakatra. Tonga ny vazaha da nanamboatra ny ady; tapitra]. The warring of the past, now a memory, has been supplanted by a less violent sense of rivalry. Physical confrontation is now a rarity but the competition between clans remains. One of the forms this competition takes is a sort of ‘bantering’ [*mifanopa/misoma/mifanasaha*] which often masks a complex residual hostility between clans. I was told that peace agreements in the past which ended the fighting between clans explicitly allowed for and encouraged verbal insults in place of fighting. As a result it is common for clansmen to make derogatory remarks about those clans who are considered past enemies. However since all clans were involved in fighting, no clan or village escapes the opinion of its neighbours. The clans cast each other as having certain stereotypical characteristics [*tsy mitovy toetra ny faritra*]:

The *Tevongo*, who pride themselves on their Christian rectitude, are cast as a weak people, lacking vitality and living in isolated homesteads. A discussion about inter-clan rivalry in the home of the ‘*rangahy*’ [old man] at *Masimboay* (clan *Vohilakatra*) led to hilarity as a narrator recounted the disastrously unsuccessful farming techniques of the people of *Tsaragisy* (a *Tevongo* village). There was unconcealed mirth at the idea of the *Tevongo*’s never-ending quest to find a homestead that will yield them 10 sacks of rice²⁴. The *Masitafika* are perceived by other clans to be quarrelsome and untrustworthy, unreformed robbers who reject the church and continue to practise polygamy. The *Masitafika* themselves take pride in their buccaneering reputation. The *Vohilakatra* are thought of as proud and independent, distancing themselves from *Vondrozo*, preferring to concentrate on their own affairs. They enjoy the reputation of being strong enough to stand alone. The *Antsoro* are thought of as powerful and aloof. They are said to be suspicious of strangers, unwilling to welcome them into their houses. They are feared because they are seen as anti-social and unwelcoming and because they are thought to pose a military threat to the other clans. Past *Antsoro* forays into *Vondrozo*, designed to bolster their authority in the administrative centre, are still talked about today. The *Lohanosy* are presented as guardians of traditional custom [*fomba*]. People comment on the size and robustness of their Big-Houses (ceremonial houses that act as a centre for authority) and their strict adherence to the ‘traditional way’. The *Antevatobe* are associated with the wild men of old; the rebel bandits known as the *Mavorongo* [which means yellow/grey hair, due to infamous hairstyle consisting of balls of hair held together by grease and earth] who resisted all outside authority and who were

never subdued. They are thought of as wild and unruly, tending towards anarchy and uncontrolled cattle-rustling. People talk in hushed tones of their infamous past. The *Tesonjo* are associated with the isolated semi-forested niche they inhabit. The fact that they are perceived to be one step removed from the heart of the action allows them to be portrayed as country bumpkins but it also lends them an air of mystery and magic. The *Tesonjo* are thought of as experts on wood and herbal medicines.

These are just some of the stereo-typical characterisations that the clans present of each other. Casting each clan individually serves to maintain the perceived differences between them. The members of each clan think of themselves as having a distinct and separate identity to that of their neighbouring clans.

Differences and similarities between clans

All the clans oral histories suggest that they came from outside the area and settled in *Sahafatra*; no clan claims to be autochthonous. The present day clans are believed to have started arriving in *Sahafatra* about 180 years ago. Difference between clans is thought to stem from the fact that all the clans migrated to the region of *Sahafatra* at different times and from different places [cf Thomas 1996:17]. So as far as the people of *Sahafatra* are concerned the clans do not share any origin points and they do not share any ancestors [cf Thomas 1996:11-12 for an example of a clearer and more consistent origin myth for the *Temanambondro* of southeast Madagascar].

By all accounts the process of settlement was not a peaceful one. All the clans remember how they were interminably fighting with one another until the arrival of the French. This extended period of warfare (approx. 1820-1900) in the past is used as evidence by those living today for the eternal and intrinsic ²⁵ difference between the clans. The clans are thought to have been independent of each other ever since their arrival in the area. Popular belief has it they were autonomous and self-sustaining ²⁶. One feature of this is that each clan was endogamous. The only exception to this endogamy was the taking of women by force [*misazo viavy*] from other groups. These women captives, violently poached from other clans, effectively became the

property of the marauding clan and were taken as wives.

In the past then the clans are supposed to have been 'closed' to each other; most of the interaction between them was violent. The form of some of the present day customs is said to have resulted from the insecurity of this time. The paranoid nature of contemporary burial practice for example, which involves disposing of leaders' bodies at night, is believed to stem from fear in the past that the body would be stolen by ones enemies. This period of imagined 'closure' began to come to an end under the enforced pacification of the clans by the French in the early 1900's. Under pressure from the French colonial regime the clans made peace treaties with their neighbours and traditional enemies. The treaties took the form of sworn 'contracts' [*ziva*] between pairs of clans. The sum of all these bilateral treaties created a network of cross-cutting alliances between the clans that effectively resulted in the aforementioned Pax *Sahafatra*.

The general peace and the creation of the neutral (ie outside the jurisdiction of any clan) market/administrative centres governed by the French allowed for more inter-action between the clans. Before the arrival of the French all the clans shared was a common commitment to the land of *Sahafatra* ; they vied for political domination and contested territory through war. After the arrival the clans began to 'discover' other things they had in common.

In the minds of the people of *Sahafatra* today it was the arrival of the French that heralded the dramatic change in relations between the clans. A disparate collection of unrelated clans became a de facto, if somewhat messy, federation under colonial rule. In the decades that followed a major new precedent was set as the clans began to inter-marry. Gradually the practice became wide-spread ²⁷. Nowadays about half of all marriages are inter-clan. There is no strict rule for clan endogamy or exogamy ²⁸. What people like to stress is free choice expressed in their words by the idea that any young man can 'pick up'[*mangala*] a wife at market ²⁹ . The implications of inter-marriage were far-reaching: members of different clans who were previously unrelated to each other became kin [*hava*]. The nature of everyday life changed as people who had had no reason to see each other before began to make reciprocal visits.

The changing nature of clan interaction is clearly demonstrated by the structural transformation

of the important relationship between mother's brothers [*endrilahy*] and sister's sons [*zanak-anakavy*]. Previously endogamy meant that this was purely an intra-clan affair; however, now that clans inter-marry it has become an inter-clan relationship too as mother's brothers can be from a different clan. Since mother's brothers support sister's sons by acting as secondary fathers and since sister's sons pay homage to mother's brothers by acting as dutiful sons their mutual involvement is clear to see ³⁰. Both are required to make the effort to witness the ceremonies in which the other is implicated. Hence clans begin to be drawn into each others ceremonial lives and to recognise each other as kin ³¹.

The emergence of inter-marriage between the clans introduced the idiom of kinship relations. Now, instead of viewing each other as completely unconnected the clans sometimes refer to each other in kinship terms. On ceremonial occasions clans will refer to each other as 'brothers' [*rahalahy*] nicely capturing the idea of family and of equality. When clan members are asked what the clans of *Sahafatra* have in common they will often reply that they are all descended from one ancestor [*raza-iraika*]. Here we have come full circle: clans that have self-confessedly told of their diverse origins are also happy to claim common descent with each other.

The clans also claim to share one universal ancestral taboo [*sandrana*]: they are not allowed to kill or eat a small, prickly, hedgehog-like creature called a 'sokina' [cf Ruud 1960:76-110]. Although people are not very explicit on why this should be the case, the taboo itself looked at in context is instructive [cf Lan 1985:22-24 for the subtleties of clan affiliation through animal taboos]. The 'sokina' is just one of three types of Malagasy 'hedgehog' found in the area (the others being the 'sora' and the 'trandraka'); however it is the only one that is taboo. What, we might then ask, is the difference between the animals that should make this so? The difference that people highlighted was not a physical one, but a behavioural one: when it thundered [*migodo*] and the animals rushed out of their burrows they behaved differently when faced by danger. Both the 'sora' (the smallest) and the 'trandraka' (the biggest) would flee, whereas the 'sokina' (of middling size) would stubbornly roll up into a ball and stay put. The only explanation I was ever given for the taboo was that this behaviour was like that of the people of *Sahafatra* themselves who have always refused to be pushed out of their homeland and who would rather brave the danger with their 'spines' out so to speak, like the hedgehog, than flee.

If this interpretation has any merit then the '*sokina*' is a sort of totemic animal which is left alone out of common fellow feeling.

Whatever the truth of the matter it is evident that there is no single way of talking about clan relations. Different idioms can be utilised depending on the circumstances and what aspect of a complex relationship one wants to emphasise. In general terms it would probably be most accurate to say that the people of *Sahafatra* view themselves as a loose Family of Clans, related more by fellow feeling than genealogy. This idea posits some connection, but a connection that can be played up or played down. It is a suitably vague term for what is a very indefinite and flexible web of relations.

The idea of a Family of Clans is strengthened by the surface similarity between members of different clans. It is important to realise that no-one could identify some-one else's clan simply from their physical appearance. Clans do not have distinguishing physical characteristics and they do not dress in a particular way so clan membership can only be surely identified by asking someone what village they come from. The physical 'sameness' of the different clans is unifying in a sense but it is also problematic. The total anonymity of passers-by is very worrying (security-wise) to the average villager and it is common custom to question anyone you meet on the path as to where they are coming from, where they are going and what the purpose of their journey is. People explained how they made an effort to store this information in their head and to remember the face of the stranger so that he could be tracked down if he should cause trouble in the area. It troubled people that external likeness was no guarantee that a person was of like kind.

In spite of this what seems to make the clans form a set is the fact that they recognise that they have many things in common with each other in contrast to the neighbouring peoples who encircle them. They share an administrative district (the *fivondronana* of *Vondrozo*), a particular type of environment (virgin territory), a set mode of subsistence (wet rice agriculture), and a distinct way of life comprising a large body of customs held in common. Perhaps most importantly they share a very specific type of authority system.

What is *Sahafatra* really: a way of life and a way of looking at the world

So far I have gone through a technical discussion about when, and in what sense, it is appropriate and justifiable to use the term *Sahafatra*. I have tried to approximately trace the emergence of some of the different ideas contained within the term in order to present its full range of meaning and I have outlined the relations between the constituent clans. However, as I have hinted at during the text, this rather pedestrian and lifeless (though necessary!) approach is alien to the people of *Sahafatra* themselves. For them the term *Sahafatra* is far more emotive, connoting an essential, if somewhat difficult to put your finger on, aspect of their identity. In this concluding section I want to try and capture what I see this ‘essence’ to be by presenting a more holistic and conceptual account of what it is to be *Sahafatra*.

When we think of *Sahafatra* as a way of life and a way of looking at the world it becomes evident that *Sahafatra* is not simply the name of a land or a people. It does not comprise a kingdom or a principality, it has no paramount ruler that everyone can identify, it has no stable fixed boundaries, does not accurately coincide with any administrative district and receives no official recognition from the centralised nation-state. It does not consist of a single ethnic group, nor do the people share a distant ancestor or a completely unified set of customs, nor do they display any surface distinguishing features that could definitively mark them out from their neighbours. *Sahafatra* is not a satisfactory label because it does not connote an easily identifiable group, or a chunk of land that can be circumscribed and demarcated. But if it is not a land and not a people then what is it and does it have any significance? The simple answer is that *Sahafatra* is a particular type of landscape, a specific and peculiar environment that demands that it be inhabited by a certain kind of people, following a certain way of life. And to these people the nature of their habitat is of tremendous import. But since *Sahafatra* is not a land or a people one could fairly wonder why it has the capacity to endure.

You will not find *Sahafatra* on a map (at least not on a map produced by the Malagasy rather than a foreign academic [cf Ruud 1960 for such a map]) and you will not hear anyone referring to themselves as *An-Sahafatra* ie people heralding from *Sahafatra*. Its continuing existence as a perceived entity is a demonstration of persisting loyalty towards an idea. The ‘essence’ of

Sahafatra lies in the fact that the people living in this loosely defined area hold an attitude towards the land that posits and perpetually reconfirms an intimate connection between it, themselves and their way of life. They have adopted an ethic of involvement with the land that colours (or rather allows them to actively colour in) the world they perceive around them [cf Thomas 1996:23-24].

The contingent/symbiotic relationship between the land and the people gives meaning to the term *Sahafatra*. The relationship fills out the term because the term does not represent an entity but rather an outlook and an interaction. The interactive aspect orients this study towards the investigation of *Sahafatra* as a social space. For once the anthropological jargon seems appropriate because it is in tune with the concerns of the people. *Sahafatra* is a dreadful void (a veritable gaping chasm of social space) that must be brought to life and filled with meaning and significance not just by the ethnographer but also by the people themselves [cf McKinnon 1991:63-106 on 'world-building' on the Tanimbar islands]. The idea of an empty space is not a hollow one conjured out of thin air. As has been noted *Sahafatra* means 'barren land', 'virgin territory' or 'empty valley'. It conveys the image of a wasteland, a wilderness, a savage and harsh place associated with relentless hardship and an absence of food. In Malagasy terms it is the equivalent of a desert (an uncultivated area [OED]) - a world without rice paddies. Considering that this is a well-watered and fertile piece of land this state of affairs entails almost criminal neglect in the hearts and minds of the people; for this is no Sahara, this is a potential granary to feed thousands.

The potential of the land as well as its present sterility is encompassed in the term *Sahafatra*. After all to a committed (almost messianic) rice farmer an empty valley is a seductive sight, an unsolicited invitation begging to be taken advantage of. In this wilderness the potential for growth and plenty is laid out for all to see: valleys waiting to be terraced, rivers ripe for exploiting, marshes ready to be drained. And the Malagasy peasant farmer is only too aware of this potential, the promise of the land is dazzling to him, like a taunt. The disparity between the embarrassment of riches afforded by the land and the actual state of poverty the farmer finds himself in is a constant source of amazement, sorrow and disappointment. On many occasions people expressed their confusion to me, scratching their heads in bemused wonder as they

surveyed the profusion of growth on the land before lowering their gaze to their children dressed in rags, and reduced to eating insects [*angoaky*] and fruit to satisfy their hunger (these not counting as real food).

The only way he can get his head round this apparent conundrum is to think of his work on the land as unfinished. It is this sense of incompleteness that drives him on to greater efforts, that gives him a measure by which to condemn or value his fellows, that provides the impetus for his children to move into new country. But this sense of incompleteness does not generate a pure unalloyed work ethic. Admiration for 'The Man Who Gets Things Done' is tempered by fear that one might not quite be that man. The result is an uneasy relationship between an ethic promoting ever-increasing production and expansion and a mania for enforced redistribution and contraction, a sort of falling back into yourself.

The landscape of the past is thought of as a bare slate [*tsy nisy tana; tsy nisy tani-kosy; tsy nisy ala*] (a tabula rasa not of the mind but of the earth), a contoured and watered surface upon which man could impose his structures. This is the point of arrival for the immigrant (and the point of departure for this study). As he looks down from on high he sees the 'Promised Land' spread out before him. He does not see scenery but a land waiting to be worked full of endless potential and endless potential danger. To say that the land looks beautiful [*tsara tarehy*] is nonsensical and begs a blank or contemptuous look. To say that the land is pleasing [*mahafinaritra*] is less objectionable but is really only a passing comment on one's personal state of mind rather than a valid value judgement. To say that the land is vast [*malalaka*] and inexhaustible [*tsy ho lany*] on the other hand is to earn instant approval in the eyes of a local. Now you're talking his language! This is not a backdrop to life, it is life. It is a rich and powerful resource to be controlled, mastered and fought over and a force to be reckoned with. What Humphrey says of Mongolian culture is equally applicable here: "landscapes are ... in the nature of practices designed to have results: it is not contemplation of the land that is important but interaction with it, as something with energies far greater than the human" [Humphrey 1995:135]. This is why the people of *Sahafatra* are in the process of moulding and shaping the land; peopling it with mythical figures and forces; creating landmarks and constructing stories round them and investing these features with meaning, value and danger. This is landscape gardening on a grand



The contrast between the empty landscape and a ceremonial village

scale, total involvement with the land. Not just mere excavation of the earth for practical purposes but engagement with it on a social and emotional level. The cultural resources available to interpret the events of everyday life develop in tandem with the evolution of the land. Work in progress on the land is also work in progress on the mind producing a landscape of mind or possibly a 'mind-scape' of land [cf Hirsch 1995 on what 'landscape' is].

The story (so far)

The stories of settlement are various and inconsistent. But whether the groups were marauding bands of warriors, ambitious immigrants, ex-slaves on the run or whatever, they shared a certain perspective: they were all outsiders coming in, essentially refugees lost in space, searching for fertile land. Marchand captures the mood well:

"The family-heads, tired of cultivating an ungrateful soil, and dreaming of fertile rice-paddies layed out beside large rivers, left in search of the promised land, and stopped where they found rich pastures for their herds, extensive marshes to sow their rice, and elevated hillocks on which to perch their villages" [Marchand 1901:485, my translation] ³².

What they carried with them was a desire to attach themselves to places and people, to create islands of plenty and security in a terrestrial sea of scarcity and pirates. And what they all did without exception was to cut themselves off from their past (outside of *Sahafatra*). They cast off the mooring ropes of their roots [cf Thomas 1997 on how migrants 'cut roots'] and lay adrift in a pool of competitors and rivals. This was the end of the line; there was to be no moving on or going back; they determined to fight. The truly committed do not look to the past; they know that they cannot equally be of there and here. So instead of cherishing remembrance of memories past they turned to creation.

But it was not to be a peaceful creation, in fact it was essential that it was based on violence directed both towards the land and to other people. Violence was used to gain land, to farm the

land, and to win women as wives. The creation of a new homeland was born of violence and fed off violence, both literal and metaphorical. At first the clans fought with spears [*lefo*] raiding other clans to steal the bodies of their chiefs, vanquish them and take their women as wives [*misazo vady*]. Then with French pacification new testing grounds were devised: people developed curses [*opa*] and bad medicine [*aody mahafaty*]; they invented impossibly demanding reciprocal relationships policed by the ancestors [*fanange*]; they stole each others cows; they instituted new para-legal institutions [*Dina*] to prevent people from stealing each others cows; they boxed [*moraingy*]; they fought with words [*miady am-bava*], argued custom, employed threats and intimidation and took to competitive conspicuous consumption with a vengeance ... and on and on.

And the fight is not yet over - rather it has become the whole point, an end in itself. The forms of combat are not only changing, they are also multiplying. The field of operations is expanding and the result is the increasing impossibility of safely navigating through life without being overtaken by disaster. The increasing complexity, pervasiveness and cross-cutting nature of the dynamic arena that is conflict means that resolution can only be temporary. The dangers are not increasing in one dimension only. Not only is the number of types of conflict increasing, the fact is that conflict leaves behind a residue as it is incorporated into and mapped onto the landscape (sometimes for all time). Combat leaves behind a minefield to be negotiated by those that follow. The connection between combat and the environment lies in the telling. When an episode of conflict is recounted with reference to the land then the land itself is changed forever. The landscape becomes charged by the telling but the telling also provides a mental map that allows the listeners to avoid the potential pitfalls around them. This then is the catch, Catch 22. The sheer impossibility of the task of living gives life the epic quality that is so valued. The catch is not really a catch because the celebration of the struggle nurtures the testing system and allows people to create, and therefore perceive themselves as living, epic lives. It is the living out of epic lives by 'great' people that generates fertility/blessing for the masses.

Endnotes

1. The area was associated with the ‘people of the forest’ [*Tanala*] who were thought of as ‘uncivilized’. The land they inhabited was perceived by outsiders to be ‘wilderness’ [*efitra*], overrun by bands of robbers hiding in the tall grass [Knight 1893]. For the highland bearers of early missionaries and explorers it was a region full of terrors, ghosts and witches, to be passed through as quickly as possible on the way to ‘civilization’. The root of this fear seems to stem from archetypal characteristics attributed to the *Tanala*. In accounts of the time they always seem to be referred to as heavily-armed, wild or barbaric [Knight 1893; Sibree 1876:38]. The true opposition here seems to be between *Tanala* and *Merina*, most strongly signified by the contrast of the forest with its “rank growth” filled with “brutal-looking savages” [Knight 1893:397], and the open civilized country of the high plateaux.

2. See, for example, the description by James Sibree (of the London Missionary Society) of his journey through south-east Madagascar [Sibree 1876] for a peripheral view of the lands outside *Merina* hegemony. See also the description of a journey made between Fort Dauphin and *Fianarantsoa* made by missionary E. F. Knight for a similar view [Knight 1893]. A slight exception to the general trend is provided by missionary C. Collins [Collins 1897] who at least provides a genuine eye-witness account of a village within the land of *Sahafatra*. He visited what is the present day territory of *Sahafatra* (although he misidentified the people as *Tanala*) and met the then ‘king’ of the *Antevato* clan, *Tsimivony*. What is interesting about this account is how Collins describes an independent, militarized and strongly fortified ‘kingdom’, reinforcing the idea of small autonomous territories.

3. The major *Merina* forts were located at *Vohipeno*, *Mahamanina*, *Ankarana*, *Vaingaindrano*.

4. These rebels/ bandits were known as ‘*mavorongo*’ [yellow-heads] by the *Merina* because of their strange hair-do. “On les appelait autrefois ‘*Mavorongo*’ (cheveux jaunes, ou gris; parce qu’ils les portaient en boules graissees de suif melange d’argile)” [Descamps/Vianes 1959:84]. Collins [Collins 1897:353] highlights the propensity of the *Antevato* to rustle cattle and emphasizes the war-like nature that earned them such a fiery reputation; he also provides a graphic description of this hairstyle which was peculiar to the region at that time: “Their hair is arranged by means of evil-smelling fat into six or eight balls about the size of a small orange. These balls, when hard, are of a greyish tint and as solid as wood, indeed resounding quite as much. When their hair is freshly arranged, one may see the beaux of the village strutting about as proud as peacocks.” Knight [1893:396] also describes ‘*mavorongo*’ hair: “Their coiffure is not elegant in European eyes: their black hair is twisted up into a number of balls - about the size of a billiard ball - which are thickly plastered with fat and white earth”. Because of its pejorative connotations the appellation ‘*mavorongo*’ is nowadays largely disowned (although it is still whisperingly associated with the *Antevato*). However, the hairstyle is occasionally recreated when dressing the dead body of an important leader before burial in the tomb; “les cheveux sont encore parfois mis en boule et oints de terre (a la mode des ancetres)” [Descamps/Vianes 1959:86].

5. The only mention of more than a few lines that I have found in the literature referring to *Sahafatra* is a 6 page section in Deschamps and Vianes book on the peoples of south-east Madagascar [Deschamps/Vianes 1959:83-89] which provides an uncertain, sketchy and generalizing account at best.

6. “Dans peu de regions de Madagascar on compte autant de petites tribus distinctes, ayant leur individualite propre, vivant les unes a cote des autres sans se meler, que dans la province de Farafangana. Les unes, de race autochtone, sont la, on ne sait au juste depuis quelle epoque, fixees, soit dans les estuaires des fleuves, soit dans les vallees profondes de l’interieur, au temps deja ‘ou la foret allait de la mer a la montagne’, suivant les dires des anciens.” [Marchand 1901:481].

7. The French colonial administration patented its own methods for the creation and investment of meaning. Their inability or unwillingness to understand important themes in Malagasy culture lead them to introduce the ‘politique des races’ [Covell 1987:15], a system of indirect rule that implicitly assumed that there were traditional institutions of authority through which to channel power. This policy required the French to find (or nominate) ‘traditional’ leaders to rule as intermediaries. The underlying principle was that all ‘native’ groups

should govern themselves under the umbrella-like supervision of the French authorities. The weakness of the policy lay in the fact that there were not always 'traditional' leaders in situ. In these cases the French had to create leaders where there were none before. Not surprisingly the new leaders were not necessarily respected or obeyed by the people they were nominally meant to represent as there was no 'traditional' basis for their authority. The policy was to be assisted by the transplantation of *Merina 'fokonolona'* (village councils that had already been transformed into an arm of the state) into new areas, for the purposes of enabling the collection of taxes and the extraction of corvée labour. The whole system was to be policed by regional administrative posts, operating in accordance with the oil spot [tache d'huile] principle, that theorized that power should diffuse outwards from the centre [Thompson/Adloff 1965:15]. The result of this combination was, in effect, to split up the people ruled into bounded groups, who were then perceived in terms of race or tribe. The research of the Académie Malgache, set up to operate in conjunction with the colonial administration, reinforced these ideas during the process of collecting basic data on the population, deemed essential for the effective management of French rule [Thompson/Adloff 1965:15]. The problem with the French boundaries, often based on crude geographic criteria, was that they were not representative of the significant symbolic divisions in Malagasy life. The resulting group labels (18 officially recognised by the Malagasy government, the *Sahafatra* not being one of them) are a mess: some were derived from the pre-colonial empires, some were survivals of earlier traditions, some were mistakenly taken from early travellers' naive accounts [see Eggert 1986 on the Mahafaly], and some simply created by the French administration.

8. See Leguevel de Lacombe's account of his journey through the region made in 1830 [Leguevel de Lacombe 1840] for confirmation.

9. "Si les tribus des bords de la Renana ont été assujetties par les Hova [the term for Merina at that time], celles qui se trouvaient au sud de cette ligne: Hovalahy, Hova [not the *Merina* but a local clan], Ivatobe, Antevongo, Vohilakatra, Sahavoay, Tsiaretra, Antsoro, échapperont à toute domination. Bien plus, les commerçants Ambaniandro [another name for the Merina] qui voulaient aller trafiquer dans leurs villages, étaient obligés de leur payer un droit de passage pour n'être pas inquiétés dans leurs opérations." [Marchand 1901:482].

10. Bearing in mind the confusion created by labels attributed by external agents, the uncertainty of the principles that lead to the generation of these labels, and the multiplex meanings attached to any particular one, it does not seem sensible to attempt to define labels such as *Sahafatra* in rigid, uni-vocal terms. It is more constructive to look at specific labels as part of a more general set in order to examine how they are used as flexible tools for identity construction, and more specifically how they are utilized in different ways, for political purposes as well as for purposes of identification. Such an approach reveals important themes underlying Malagasy life. Group labels in Madagascar display three key themes: environment (the nature of the area inhabited or of the land from whence one came or the technological specialization practiced); ancestry (either specific or as part of a dynastic heritage); characteristics relating the group to, or distancing it from, other political entities (expressions of group solidarity, physical characteristics, actions that mark one out, administrative divisions). The three themes demonstrate the existence of different priorities for different peoples, some concerned with their relationship with the land, others with their dynastic heritage, and yet others with what they do. It is my intention to show that the *Sahafatra* label is most intimately connected with the environmental theme, in contrast to many of the labels connoting surrounding groups, that refer more to the other two themes.

11. "Le pays des Chaffates dans lequel nous entrons...est un peu moins stérile, mais encore plus sauvage que celui des Chavoaiés. Là il n'y a pas d'associations d'hommes assez nombreuses pour composer des villages; aussi n'y voit-on que des hameaux formés de la réunion de douze ou quinze cases.

Le costume des Chaffates est plus misérable encore que celui de leurs voisins; leurs montagnes étant plus élevées, ils n'ont pas comme eux des marais qui leur procurent du jonc pour faire des nattes; presque tous n'ont qu'un seul petit morceau d'écorce d'arbres pour couvrir leur nudité.

Nous marchâmes pendant deux jours à l'ouest dans les montagnes; les sentiers commençaient à devenir difficiles et l'armée était forcée de faire de fréquentes haltes. Je profitai de ce retard pour visiter le pays des Chaffates; je pensais que si je me rendais seul à leur grand village, il me serait facile, en attendant l'armée, de faire connaissance avec quelque indigène dont je pourrais obtenir des renseignements sur les ressources et les usages de sa peuplade.

Je me mis donc en route a cheval, n'ayant pour escorte que mes maremites et quelques miangourandes de la garde de Rene. Nous rencontrames bientot plusieurs Chaffates, mais il nous fut impossible d'en aborder un seul; des qu'ils nous apercevaient, ils se sauvaient avec tant de vitesse que mon cheval au galop n'aurait pas pu les atteindre si l'etat de la route m'eut permis de les poursuivre.

J'esperais causer moins de frayeur aux habitants de Fahandza, leur village principal ou j'entrai avant l'armee, apres deux jours de march toujours a l'O. et dans les montagnes. Mais a notre arrivee l'epouvante fut generale; les meres se haterent d'enlever leurs enfants et de prendre la fuite; les hommes les suivirent en poussant des cris de terreur et laisserent le village absolument desert. Maitres de la place, les maremites n'eurent pas la peine de faire cuire le diner des pauvres Chaffates; ils s'en regalerent sans scrupule.

L'un d'eux, qui alla chercher dans le village du tabac pour faire son houchouk, revint un instant apres m'annoncer qu'il avait decouvert un homme; je m'empressai de me rendre aupres du sauvage.

Je trouvai etendu sur des feuilles seches un vieillard que ses infirmites avaient pu seules retenir dans sa cabane; il etait tellement epouvante qu'un begaiement convulsif l'empechait d'articuler; il me fallut du temps pour le rassurer, et lorsqu'il fut un peu plus calme il me parla, en termes emphatiques, comme font otus les Malgaches, des motifs qui avaient fait deserter le village. J'ai conserve soigneusement ses paroles qui caracterisent bien l'esprit superstitieux et ignorant de cette peuplade: -Quoique ta couleur ne soit pas la meme que la notre, me dit-il, les Chaffates t'auraient recu comme un frere si tu t'etais presente seul chez eux, car ton corps, tes bras et tes jambes ne different pas des autres quoiqu'ils soient couverts de richesses dont l'usage nous est inconnu, et dont nous n'avons pas besoin; mais nous avons appris par le kabar des Chavoais l'arrivee de l'armee que tu proteges; ils t'ont vu monter sur une bete effroyable, dont la bouche est armee de fer et qui n'obeit qu'a toi seul. Nous avons appele les ombiaches et consulte le mampila qui nous a prevenus du danger qui nous menacait; cet animal, nous a-t-il dit, est venu pour vous exterminer tous; il tient d'Angatch et dy geant votre ennemi le pouvoir magique qu'il exerce; aucun Malgache n'a pu l'approcher sans mourir; car sa force est si extraordinaire que d'un coup de pied il tue cent hommes; il fait trembler la terre quand il la frappe du pied; sa course est encore plus rapide que celle d'un sanglier qui fuit devant les chiens; il ne nourrit de chair humaine et devorerait les soldats du roi rouge eux-memes si l'ombiache blanc ne le lui defendait pas. Telle a ete la reponse du mampila qui nous a ete transmise par nos ombiaches; toi qui dois etre beaucoup plus puissant qu'eux, puisque tu commandes a ce monstre, dis-lui d'epargner un pauvre vieillard qui n'a plus que peu de jours a vivre et dont les chairs dessechees ne seraient pour lui qu'un maigre repas. -

Les Chaffates appelaient mon cheval *Bakou-bak* et disaient que l'arrivee de cette bete avait ete predite a leurs aieux: ils assuraient qu'un animal tout-a-fait semblable a celui qu'ils voyaient figurait dans leur tradition; il devait venir du cote de l'orient pour detruire les peuplades malgaches.

L'effet qu'avait produit mon cheval sur les Chavoais et les Chaffates me suggera l'idee d'accréditer les fables auxquelles il avait donne lieu. J'annoncai donc au vieillard que les Chaffates ne devaient pas redouter la colere du monstre qui n'etait envoye que pour exterminer les Vourimes, dont les brigandages ne pouvaient rester impunis.

L'armee n'arriva que le soir a Fahandza et n'y trouve pas de vivres, l'obscurite ne permettant pas de decouvrir les plantations des Chaffates. Ce village est situe pres d'une belle riviere; ses cabanes sont nombreuses, mais petites et miserables.

Les Chaffates ne voyagent jamais; leurs montagnes ne produisent que tres peu de riz, mais on y trouve du mais dont ils font griller les epis avant leur maturite; c'est leur principale nourriture avec du lait qu'ils font cailler dans de grands bambous.

Le gros de l'armee se reposa a Fahandza pendant deux jours et ne parvint a se procurer des vivres qu'en allant a la maraude, car les boeufs et meme les poules avaient ete enleves du village. Jean-Rene donna le commandement d'une partie de la division hova au major Ratsiatou et l'envoya en avant-garde dans le pays des Vourimes dont nous n'etions pas eloignes." [Leguevel de Lacombe 1840:238-242].

12. "Les armees merina s'avancerent jusqu'a la montagne Madorano, qui domine Vondrozo et y rencontrerent les guerriers sahafatra. C'est sans doute l'expedition a laquelle participa Leguevel de Lacombe. Il y en eut deux autres, qui etablirent des postes et emmenerent des esclaves. Mais en fait, les Sahafatra conserverent leur independence. Les francais occuperent le pays sans difficulte, sauf des luttes episodiques contre des bandes de pillards" [Deschamps/Vianes 1959:84].

13. Decary mentions the *Sahafatra* and describes them as 'les gens des clairieres' [the people of the clearings]: "Cantonnes sur les bords du haut Manampatrana, au pied des montagnes, les Sahafatra (gens des clairieres) forment une petite tribu de 25 000 ames; ils se rapprochent beaucoup des Tanala par leurs caracteres et leur genre de vie. D'apres leurs traditions ils seraient originaires du pays Mahafaly; ils considerent en tout cas comme independants de Tanala et affirment que le sol sur lequel ils vivent leur a toujours appartenu." [Decary 1951:9]. Despite their protestations of independence Decary compartmentalises the *Sahafatra* with the *Tanala* and therefore assumes, without justification, that they live in clearings in the forest rather than in clear open spaces. Grandidier also classified them as *Tanala*, and Deschamps, following their lead, makes the same assumptions: "Il semble que cette region ait ete boisee autrefois comme le pays tanala et quasi deserte. Les immigrants y sont venus pour faire des tavi, puis, une fois la foret detruite, s'y sont stabilises avec des rizieres. On compte generalement 4 ou 5 generations depuis la venue du premier ancetre" [Deschamps/Vianes 1959:84]. I believe the classification of the *Sahafatra* as *Tanala* to be mistaken; of all the clans only 2 (the *Tesonjo* and the *Antemahatsinjobe*) claim *Tanala* roots; the rest claim diverse origins from as far afield as the present day territories of the *Mahafaly*, *Bara*, *Betsileo*, *Antaisaka*, *Antaimoro*, *Antaifasy*, *Sakalava*, and *Antandroy*. Their association with the forest seems to have no basis in reality apart from this imaginary and fictitious affiliation, attributed by foreign authors, with the *Tanala*. First and foremost there is no evidence that the area was heavily forested; from the earliest descriptions onwards the region has been described as an empty place (by outsiders and through the oral histories of the people of *Sahafatra* themselves). Secondly, the present day people of *Sahafatra* do not talk of a heritage of slash and burn agriculture [*tavy*] and do not talk of ever having lived in the forest; the forest has always been a natural barrier marking the west of their territory, a place where the brave might go to collect medicines or hunt wild boar, but it has never been their home. Thirdly, the people of *Sahafatra* do not have a positive affinity for the forest, but are rather very afraid of it, the wild animals [*biby*] that roam it, and the ghosts, shades and spirit familiars that haunt it. So if anything, the people of *Sahafatra* (like the *Zafimaniry* described by Bloch) have negative feelings towards the forest. Unlike the *Zafimaniry* their lives are not dedicated to cutting it down; however they share with them the attitude that that is just about all it is good for. The irony is that the lives of the *Sahafatra* are, in fact, dedicated to creating forest; not forest like the wild jungly forest to the west but man-made domesticated forests to shade their coffee, their villages and rice-paddies and to provide many varieties of fruit. The people of *Sahafatra* are engaged in filling up the empty landscape they inherited, regenerating their own environment/world rather than appropriating and destroying another.

14. A story I heard once, but which was never corroborated by any other contemporary informant, told of how *Sahafatra* is the name of a river, to be found in what is now *Zaramanampy* territory, beside which the *Vohilakatra* lived before they moved to their present location. Deschamps and Vianes also tell of such a river, a tributary of the *Manambato*; however I never heard this explanation repeated again and it cannot therefore really be said to have any significance for the general population.

15. The idea of an extended area ripe for development is reinforced by the fact that the major river at the heart of the territory is called the *Manampatra* [*manana+fatrana*] which means to stretch out into open space and which therefore conveys the same sense as '*Sahafatra*'. The river is only given this name when it emerges from the forested escarpment to the west, the upper reaches in *Bara*-land being referred to by a different name. This suggests that the name of the river is referring to the open landscape through which it flows in its final stages on the way to the sea.

16. Deschamps and Vianes estimate, made in 1959, that the original migrants had arrived about 4 or 5 generations before, fits in roughly with my estimate of 7 generations, made in 1996.

17. According to Deschamps/Vianes [1959:84-86] many of the clans have clear origins: the *Antevato* are said to have come from Africa (they note that they are particularly black) and then been a part of the kingdom of *Fiherena* on the west coast; the *Hova* are said to herald from *Ambava-Hova* in the district of *Benenitra* in present day *Bara*-land; the *Lohanosy* supposedly come from their parent *Lohanosy* group neighbouring the *Zafisoro*; the *Antsoro* are meant to have come from the valley of the *Sahatsoro*, a tributary of the *Itomampy*; the *Tevongo* (now divided into two groups, one to the west of *Vondrozo* and one in the coastal zone between the *Vohilakatra*, the *Sahavoay* and the *Zaramanampy*) are said to have originated in *Mahafaly* country, arriving in the land of *Sahafatra* by way of *Ivongo* to the south, near *Vaingaindrano*; the *Masitafika* are also meant to

herald from *Mahafaly*; the *Vohilakatra* claim their ancestor came from overseas, through *Mahafaly* and then to *Ilakatri* in *Zaramanampy* territory, before arriving in their present territory; the *Tsaretry* are said to be a mix of people from *Mahafaly*, *Betsileo* and *Antaifasy*; the *Antesonjo* derive from the *Tanala* of *Ikongo* and come to the land of *Sahafatra* after being vassals to the *Zafinivola* to the south of their present location; the *Antemanara* are thought, like the *Tsaretry*, to be refugees, in their case coming from *Mahafaly*, *Betsileo* and *Antaisaka*. The *Antemahatsinjobe* are thought to herald from *Antaimoro* and *Tanala*. The *Hovalahy* are said to be *Tanala* of *Karianga* forced out of their original territory. Other peripheral groups such as the *Vohitsidy* and the *Zafinivola* claim origins from *Antaisaka*, *Antanosy* and *Antandroy*. The data I collected in 1996 roughly tallied with the above 'histories'; however people were very vague about where they had come from outside the land of *Sahafatra* and were not particularly concerned about it. Questions about origins were always referred upwards to elders and seniors. At first I thought this was merely secretive, but later I came to the conclusion that people really didn't know, and simply assumed their leaders would even though this was not always the case.

18. See Eggert's article "Mahafaly as Misnomer" [Eggert 1986] for a similar case.

19. See also Elle's map, which is very similar but which includes the previously omitted *Masitafika* clan, published in 1906 [Elle 1906:116-123].

20. See the maps which form part of the survey of the province of *Farafangana* published in the *Bulletin Economique de Madagascar*, Quatrieme Trimestre, 1921:221-241.

21. I visited several of these abandoned villages which are still easily visible on the high ridges even though they are deserted and overgrown. Their mountain-top locations show how people in the past were willing to sacrifice easy access to water for strategic purposes and for considerations of hierarchy.

22. Many Malagasy group labels have arisen as a result of the political formation of kingdoms and the absorption of other peoples into these kingdoms. For example, all the *Bara* kingdoms to the west were constructed out of a melange of peoples [Bastard 1904:391; Boin 1897], the word *Bara* coming to represent all those falling under the hegemony of the dominant *Zafimanely* clan in the early 19th century [Kent 1968]. The term '*Sahafatra*' is an exception to this general rule because those referred to by the term were never unified within a single kingdom.

23. "Variations in the basic Malagasy culture do exist, but the different dimensions do not co-vary or constitute cultural wholes connected to specific local groups...In general, locality and extended family are more important bases for solidary action than ethnicity" [Covell 1987:12]. This assertion, supported by ethnography from across Madagascar, provides the basis for any analysis of larger scale political formations. The inward-looking nature of Malagasy social groups suggests that broadly applicable group-labels, such as *Sahafatra*, refer to contingent, somewhat artificial political constructs; they represent a manipulation of the basic Malagasy social unit. In spite of this current group labels are not entirely lifeless and meaningless; group labels become alive when the people themselves adopt them. This is why it is worth examining how the people of *Sahafatra* use the term now.

24. The doing down of the *Tevongo* may have something to do with them being the most ritually senior clan.

25. People who fight cannot be considered kin; even if they were kin before they become non-kin.

26. It is interesting that in 16 months of fieldwork I never heard anyone talk about slavery once with reference to *Sahafatra*. I imagine that the idiom of slavery is so severely underdeveloped because slavery itself is so unthinkable. In the land of *Sahafatra* no one would countenance being anyone else's slave; hence the issue is marginalised.

27. If members of two different clans that fought interminably in the past want to get married a special ritual, known as a '*botro*' has to be performed. As I have noted above, individuals who have fought categorically cannot be kin; the same goes for members of clans that have fought. And if they are not kin they cannot marry. The purpose of the '*botro*', which involves the sacrifice of a cow given by the man, is, then, to make the couple

kin [*hava*], thereby allowing them to marry. The '*botro*' is likened to a special type of atonement [*fafy*] which unblocks the way between past enemies. The cow is sacrificed to the ancestors and the force of the environment [*Zanahary*] and its blood is daubed on the foreheads, behind the ears and on the bellies of the couple. A formulaic blessing is recited: "*Da hatsara an'azy io; da hasoa an'azy io; mba hiteraka io; mba hibaby. Ho lelahy; ho viavy; afaka io ra ny aomby io ifady; tsisy koa fady*" [Let this make him good; let this make her good; let them have children; let them cradle them. Let there be boys; let there be girls; this cow's blood frees the taboo; there is no more taboo]. The '*botro*' is also thought of as an ordeal [*tange*] that has to be gone through but which can be very difficult. The difficulty involved has given rise to a saying: "*tsy mitange iaho, tsy mibotro fa tsy hina an'iny koa*" [I will not undergo the trial, I will not put myself through the ordeal because I do not want to taste that again], and suggests that old enmities die hard.

28. Marrying 'too close' [*mifankariny loatra*] and marrying 'too far away' [*mifankalavitra loatra*] are both undesirable. As has already been noted marrying 'too far away' involves doing a '*botro*' [see note above]. Marrying close can also cause trouble: if you marry someone who is 'too close', you commit incest, thereby putting yourself, your partner, your children, and both families in mortal danger of divine retribution. The only way to attempt to redress the situation (apart from separation) is to perform a special ritual of atonement known as a '*tony*' [peace]. Only if this is successful can you then start on the official marriage process which involves the standard ritual of atonement [*fafy*]. The ideal marriage is, thus, a balance between inside and outside, marriage with kin but not with close kin [cf Huntington 1978]. Only if there is the correct 'balance' is a simple, straightforward '*fafy*' needed; if the 'balance' is wrong a '*botro*' or a '*tony*' is required.

29. This could be interpreted as a modern version of capturing wives, with young men competing to win over women from other clans so as to guarantee a surplus. Indeed young men do try to physically drag women into the bushes at village parties in a sort of ritual tug-of-war (this is a recognised game which the girls know how to escape from if they want to; taking a woman by force is a capital crime according to the law of the *Dina*). However this element of competition is counterbalanced and camouflaged by the new idiom of love [*fitiava*] in operation. 'Stealing' a wife at market may be depriving someone else of a wife and advantaging your own clan over others but this is not how it is generally thought of. The union is publicly construed in terms of personal love and compatibility, not clan competition.

30. The term for the mother's brother literally means 'male mother'. His relationship with his sister's son should start early when the sister's son is a baby. The 'male mother' [*endrilahy*] should tease his sister's son. On one occasion I witnessed a 'male mother' (only a teenager himself) pretended that he was going to give his sister's son a cattle ear-mark [*vaky sofina*] with a rusty pair of scissors.

31. It is also important to note that the emerging trend was for inter-marriage between clans of the people of *Sahafatra*, not between a *Sahafatra* clan and an outside group. Even today this is still the case; clan inter-marriage is fine but it is strongly preferred if the two clans involved are both of *Sahafatra*.

32. "Des chefs de famille, fatiguer de cultiver un sol ingrat, et revant de rizieres fertiles au bords de grands fleuves, sont partis a la recherche de la terre promise, et se sont arretes la ou ils ont trouve de gras paturages pour leur troupeaux, de vaste marais pour semer leur riz, et des mamelons eleves pour y percher leurs villages" [Marchand 1901:485].

Chapter 2

The authority system of *Sahafatra*

In this chapter I intend to outline the ‘traditional’ authority system (as opposed to that of the nation-state) in operation in the land of *Sahafatra*. For the people of *Sahafatra* to talk about authority inevitably involves talking about houses [cf Thomas 1996; McKinnon 1991; Bloch 1995b; Errington 1989]. I therefore concentrate on describing different types of houses (their nature, membership and leaders) and the structured relations between them, with the aim of beginning to explore how power is exercised in the region.

.....

Households and household design

The population of *Sahafatra* is comprised of thousands of individual Households [*trano*] spread across the countryside. The settlements look remarkably similar regardless of which clan territory you find yourself in. The architectural design of the houses is essentially the same; the structure of the household is consistent; and the layout of the houses follows the same pattern wherever you go in the region.

The houses [*trano*] are constructed in the traditional East coast style, utilising a hardwood for the framework, known as the ‘bones’ [*taola*], and the various components of the Travellers Palm [*ravinala*] for the rest. The most important section of the ‘bones’ consists of the roof pole (the beam that provides the overhead roof support) [*ambonimandry*] and the two centre-posts [*andriambo*], found at either end, that hold it up. The floor is made from the dried out and beaten flat trunk [*rapaky*] of the Traveller’s Palm; the walls [*rindry*] from its vertically positioned branch stems [*falafa*] and the roof [*tafo*] from its carefully layered fronds [*raty*]. Although there are no windows the construction of the building allows light and wind to filter through the slatted walls.

The houses are raised slightly off the ground on piles; they are rectangular in shape with the long sides and triangular wedge shaped roof oriented north-south. The houses only have one door [*varangara*] which is situated in the west side of the north wall although there is also a fastenable narrow door-sized opening in the middle of the east wall that gives access to the sacred area; this should not be used as a general thoroughfare and children are told off if they try to step through it. The houses are plain and unornamented (except for a few free calendars distributed as advertising by the local shops) and consist of a single open spaced room. The hearth [*fata*], made up of three stones arranged in a triangle on a bed of ash, is at the north end. Above this is a ramshackle shelf [*farafara*] used for storing and drying out wet fuel wood [*kitay*]. The whole north end is devoted to cooking and is cluttered with saucepans, pots, eating mats [*fandambana*], buckets full of water, crockery and enamelware. Clothes tend to hang on a line or be tucked into the wall, while sleeping mats [*fandria*] and bags tend to be suspended from the ceiling, which is blackened by wood-smoke, to maximise space. The room is multipurpose: it is used for living, sleeping, cooking and eating as well as for storage of rice that cannot fit into the separate raised granary building [*trano-ambo*] which stands alongside.

It should be noted that not all houses follow this design; some houses may have corrugated iron roofs [*vy fotsy*], some grass roofs [*tafo-bozaka*]; some may have a kitchen [*lakozy*] extension, some may have concrete foundations and some may even be built with mud on a branch lattice-work. However the most commonly found type of house and the one described by local people as 'traditional' [*fomba Sahafatra*] is the one outlined above. There is no systematic variation in styles of house between clans because all agree on what a 'traditional' house should be like. Existing variation is at an individual or village level; some people simply have more money available than others and can afford to buy cement and tin roofs; some places just do not have easy access to certain raw materials and will make do with whatever is close at hand instead. The design of the ordinary houses that people live in is a matter of personal choice, a combination of pragmatism and taste. Even so the majority of people follow the standard design.

The value attached to this style is demonstrated by the fact that all Big-Houses [*trano-be*] (ceremonial houses that act as centres of authority) must and do follow the standard plan. Physically Big-Houses simply are larger versions of ordinary houses.

Structure of the Household

The word for 'house' and 'household' are the same: '*trano*'. A Household therefore essentially consists of those living in (or stemming from) one house. At its most minimal a normal Household consists of a husband and wife and their unmarried children. All these people live in and sleep in the one-roomed house. However the maximal Household contains many more people: married sons and their wives who are not yet fully independent may spend much of their time there; daughters who have married but have split up with their husbands may return with their children to live there; blood-brothers [*fanange*] of the sons along with their wives and children may be based there; aged relatives who have no place to go may take refuge there.

Strictly defined then a Household consists of a nuclear family. However in actual practice the number of people operating out of one Household is far more numerous. Even for people who have nominally left the Household it remains an operational centre, a place where they visit, eat meals together, plan communal work and ask for the blessing of their parents. The notion of Household is flexible and inclusive. Households normally consist of a large number of people not only because of this inclusivity but also because couples favour having as big a family as possible. It is not unusual for a couple to have ten children; however high infant mortality means that many do not reach adulthood. The House and Household are known by the name of the father.

Sons: the *Bekomafa* Boys

When the male children turn into young men they may start to build their own small houses near to that of their father. This is in preparation for moving out of the parental house and for looking for a wife. When the house is complete the male son will move in. However he is still most likely only a few paces away from his father's house where he will still eat and spend almost all his time, except for sleeping. The young man is now likely to start courting in earnest ¹. The house he has built is an inducement to potential marriage partners; once a woman sees a house go up she is far more likely to take the approaches of her suitor seriously. When a match is made

the new wife moves from her father's house to live with her new husband. The couple have their own house as we have seen but initially they will still spend much time in the husband's parents' house. The young man is still subject to the authority of his father as now is his new wife. As a dutiful son he must still help work the rice-fields of his father for he has none that are strictly his own; as a dutiful daughter-in-law she must take a junior position helping out with the chores such as harvesting, threshing and pounding rice as well as child-care and cooking in her parents-in-law's house.

The new daughter-in-law will be teased [*misangisangy ratsy*] at first for her ignorance and shyness in a new place. Sometimes the teasing will be kindly meant, other times it will be rough and cruel. A song women sing while harvesting tells of the sadness of marrying far away from home and the security and comfort of close kin: "Don't marry far away, for you will have no sister, no-one to help with the weeding of the rice-fields" [*Ka manam-bady lavitra, fa tsy mana rahavavy, tsy talapio ahi-bazaha*]. All women recognise the importance of marrying into a considerate family with a gentle mother-in-law. In the village of *Andasibe* (clan *Tsaretry*) where I often visited the Big-House of *Iaban'i Mahavelo* I witnessed the arrival of a new daughter-in-law. Whenever I had visited before one of *Iaban'i Mahavelo's* daughters had cooked for everyone. However now that one of his sons had married there was a new daughter-in-law to help out. *Iaban'i Mahavelo's* son, the husband of the incoming woman, told us proudly of how well his wife cooked. She was obliged to take centre stage and nervously started cooking and tending the fire while everyone commented on her capabilities. The daughter meanwhile, relieved of her duties, was able to relax and enjoy her new found freedom. The meal turned out fine but it was clear to see how anxious the incoming daughter-in-law was even though all the banter and expectation had been very good-humoured. Throughout the preparations she was a very quiet and concentrated figure. When the rice was finally cooked the husband was very complimentary, reiterating how his wife cooked really well [*tena mahay!*].

This situation of dependence is likely to continue for some time (several years). It is usual for children to be born to the young couple during this period while they are still 'attached' to the parental house. Gradually though the son will insist on being more independent; his father may give him some land and the son may start to open up his own rice paddies as well. If all goes

well the son may build a new house on virgin land further away from his father. He will move there with his wife and growing family, he will begin to support himself, and he will visit the parental house less often. In spite of the physical separation a son can never be free from the authority of his father while the father is still alive. However he can distance himself literally and metaphorically in order to prove his own independence. A son is always in a sense part of his father's household but this goes in tandem with creating a separate household of his own.

It should be noted that not all sons end up moving far away from their fathers. To some extent this picture of outward movement is how people think it should be, not how it is on the ground. As families tend to be large there are often several sons attached to a Household. Some may venture far away but others may never leave the proximity of their father's village to settle elsewhere. There is no strict and tidy rule for who should move away and when, but elder brothers are likely to be the first to leave and younger ones are more likely to end up remaining in their village.

One family I knew particularly well was based in the village of *Bekomafa* (clan *Masitafika*). The father of the house was called *Tatahira* (or *Iaban'i Diny*) and he and his wife, *Pelamity*, had seven sons. The oldest son had already in theory broken away from his father; he had married (no children yet) and built a homestead on a hill a couple of kilometres away from his natal village. However it was a running joke in the family how he was endlessly coming back to his father's house. He was teased by his brothers for his regular visits. His inability to stay away was not a problem but it was laughed at in a gently mocking way. One time I was visiting and he was there I remarked on how long it was since I had seen him and asked whether he had been busy farming. His siblings found this hilarious because he was always coming round and because anytime he wasn't he was giving his attention to his new young wife not to the demands of the agricultural calendar.

The second oldest son was also married and already had a child. He and his wife lived in their own house in his father's village but spent much of their time in the parental house. As the eldest resident son, almost permanently present, he would take responsibility for organising the agricultural tasks [*mambo-a-draha*] delegated by the father. His wife helped cooking, collecting



The *Bekomafa* Boys at home

water [*matsaka rano*], transplanting [*manetsa*] and harvesting rice, buying and selling at market and looking after the small children.

The third son was still a bachelor and was official leader of the *Masitafika* young warriors [*panjakan'panabaka*]. This role meant he had responsibilities outside the immediate family and was often in town or traversing the countryside fulfilling his duties. He was however keen to find a wife and had started constructing a little hut a few steps away from his father's house. Only the framework was completed when I left but his brothers were already teasing him about who the wife might be.

The fourth son was definitely still living in his father's house but had already embarked on the typical young-man lifestyle: always keen to dress up in loud clothes and have a drink, and willing to walk 20 km to a distant village to find a lively party and young women. The fifth and sixth sons, about 10 and 6 yrs old, always looked slightly lost. They were too young to be roaming young men and yet too old to be tended to by their mother. The youngest son was still a little boy most commonly found lolling naked in his mother's lap or pottering about on errands close to the house.

The case of the *Bekomafa* Boys shows the different degrees of autonomy and the various semi-independent states sons can have. Although the broad cultural expectation is for them to move-out and move-on this will not necessarily be the case for all the boys. The reasons for leaving are clear and culturally elaborated: it is admirable to 'strike out on your own' [*mikombo*], to 'open up new land' [*mamelona tany vaovao*], and to 'be your own man' [*mana didy manokana*]. The reasons for not leaving are various: inertia, laziness [*ttsy maharonga tena*], lack of ambition or fear [*atahorana*] on the part of the son, combined with a tendency for fathers to 'cling' [*ttsy mahafoy*] on to their sons.

To an extent the development cycle of the household rests on the implicit struggle between sons trying to escape from their fathers and fathers trying to hold on to their sons. I was often told that fathers were unable to let go of their children, that they would not allow them to 'hatch' [*ttsy mahafoy ny iaba*]; sons, on the other hand, were said to be willing to let go, to 'hatch' [*mahafoy*]

and grow [*mitombo*]. Additional impetus is given to sons by their fear of ridicule. Sons who do not leave risk being branded as ‘grown up men still sucking on mother’s milk’ [*be minono* - this is the name of a junior age-grade]. The absence of arranged marriages, the promotion of the idea of ‘love’ [*fitiava*] which should be sought out, and marriage rules stating that people should not really marry within the Big-House (extended family) group, all also encourage young men to venture further afield, away from their natal home.

Daughters and movement

A daughter of the Household remains in her parents house until she marries. Then she moves to the village of her husband where (as we have noted) she plays the role of daughter-in-law in the Household of her parents-in-law. *Tatahira* and *Pelamity* were very proud of their daughter who they obviously thought would be a good match for any man. They always took her along with them when visiting, dressed her up in fine clothes and showed off her basketry skills in order to encourage potential suitors. It is only a question of time before the inevitable happens, and she marries and moves out.

Men are compared to insects called ‘*angoaky*’ that call out with tremendous, shrill volume during the summer days. Women are likened to grass-hoppers [*valala*] who hop around from place to place and, responding to these calls, approach [*manatona*] the men, taking their small children with them. Daughters are therefore transferred [*mifindra toera ny viavy*] from one Household to another. However their allegiance to the natal Household is never broken [for a similar case cf Lan 1985:26; also Southall 1986:420²]. If they separate [*misaraka*] from their husband they are most likely to return to their father’s Household³; when they die they will be buried in their father’s tomb despite the protestations and pleading of the husband.

So, to sum up, daughters do not set up a new Household of their own but rather serve in (and help create) a Household outside of the one they were born into. Their elevation to a new status as creative partner with the husband is clearly signified by the terminology used when they get married. The woman is ritually ‘raised up’ [*manaka-bady*] by her husband so that she may

become fully implicated and involved in the joint project of Household construction. The husband actively initiates the birth of a Household by taking/stealing [*mangala-bady*] a wife; the wife takes her position in the new house and brings with her [*apangalaentana ny piakabao*] a dowry made up of goods (sleeping mat [*fandria*], mosquito net [*trano lay*], white rice [*vary fotsy*], serving spoon [*ondriky*], dishes [*finga*], blankets [*bodofotsy*]) that begin to turn the house into a Household.

If we imagine a Household we can trace the relative movements of sons and daughters. Sons nucleate out (near or far) from the central Household of their father [cf McKinnon 1991:107-108]. They create their own new semi-independent Households. These constitute part of what becomes the Extended Household of the father. The Extended Household consists of several houses: the house of the father and the houses of all his sons. The Extended Household stems from the father's house because this was the point of departure for the sons. The movement of sons is seen as a development and extension of the original Household.

Daughters are taken away from their natal Household and only return to stay if they split from their husband or if they die. The Household they join may be in the same village as their father or it could be many miles away in a different clan territory. The movement of daughters is less systematic than that of sons; they could end up anywhere. Likewise they do not contribute so directly to the development of their father's Household because their labour capacity and their children are attached to the Household they move to ⁴.

Spatial orientation of the Household

Positioning within the house is very important. The father normally lounges by the opening in the east wall enjoying the knowledge of his honoured position as well as the extra space and cooling breeze it affords him. As head of the household he presides over affairs [*mandidy ny iaba*]. His sons tend to sit opposite him on the west wall or at the dark southern end of the house aligned in approximate (but not usually strictly enforced) age ranking, with the oldest furthest in from the main door. Every time a son enters the house, even if it is 50 times in a day, a certain

greeting, identical every time and quite long, must be gone through. The father as master of the house starts the greeting and the son respectfully answers. An example is given below when two brothers return to their father's house for the midday meal. The exchange is very hard to translate as it is ritually polite and consequently largely formulaic:

Father -Is all well?

Son 1 -Yes.

Father -How are you, I am here, so I ask again without exception, how are you all there?

Son 1 -We are well without exception, there is no news. To you all here without exception
I ask the same.

Father -There is nothing the matter, all is quiet. I ask you the same without exception.

Son 2 -From us all I ask the same, how are you all there?

Father -From I the same.

Others -From us the same.

Sons -From I the same. ⁵

There is never a time when the greeting is forgotten or considered unnecessary; however weary both sides may be (and sound) of the repetition they both still mumble the formula. A son is endlessly recognising his status as a junior and temporary visitor (only there on his father's sufferance) while the father is continually reiterating and restating his seniority within the house. The mother and matriarch of the family/house does not sit against a wall but rather takes centre stage in the middle of the room, slightly to the north, tending her fire and doting on her youngest child (or a grandchild). The daughters and daughters-in-law of the house sit in a cramped huddle just inside (but almost falling out of) the door in the northwest corner.

The father takes the senior position in the house while the mother takes the central position. The man is 'above' [*ambony*] his wife in terms of rank but she is the one actually masterminding the running of the house; this is why in some contexts she is known as master of the house [*tompon-trano*]. The father is in a sense presiding over his domain while actually taking a back seat; it is the mother who cooks on the hearth and who organises the provisions and who looks after the children. The father is a symbol of the social side of the house; it is his being there that counts.

His presence signals that the house is open to visitors whereas his absence means that the house is 'closed' even if his wife is about. Often as a guest it was painfully obvious that if the man of the house was not in we should not expect hospitality or outstay our welcome beyond a simple greeting and brief enquiry into peoples well-being.

The mother is in control of the mechanics of the everyday running of the house whereas the man represents what the idea of the simple house essentially stands for, namely a male-descent based corporation. When referring to the house it is the man's name that is used to identify it; if a marriage breaks up it is the woman who leaves to return to her fathers house ⁶ and the man who remains. In an important sense the house belongs to the man; he has built it (literally) and cannot be thrown out of it. A woman may animate a house and bring it to life but only within the framework provided by the man. The house is used to frame the idea of descent carried through the male line [cf Thomas 1995 on *Temanambondro* gender relations]. The house is a physical shell which provides set parameters through which the model of patrilineal descent ⁷ can be worked out and emphasised in daily life. This is why it is desired that a house should be full and noisy; without people to play it out the concept of descent is a meaningless failure. Descent only comes alive through participation, through people feeling it is right to sit in certain places, to perform certain duties, to use particular forms of address and so on.

In a sense the everyday activity of the house could be said to be cognatic in nature as it actively involves both sons and daughters, husbands and wives. However this cognatic aspect, an undeniable motor of life, is marginalised by the creation of a gender hierarchy within the house. The favoured members of the house are the men, the father and his sons, precisely because they are the ones directly responsible for the survival of the patrilineal house group. This is why the women defer to their authority and literally 'serve' them, shuffling forward on their knees with their heads bowed whenever they dish up a rice-meal to their menfolk.

The women's contribution is seen by the men, the power-holders, as more short-term, indirect and peripheral; the cognatic relations that they engender, though essential, are more transient than the permanent and enduring claims of the patrilineage which is formed from the ineluctable long-term developmental cycle of the house. Men are said to be 'hard' [*mafy*] and to 'last'

[*maharitra*] whereas women are said to be ‘soft’ [*malemy*] and are compared to the temporary and transferable ‘soft furnishings’ [*fanaka malemy*] within the house, the dowry gifts they themselves brought with them [cf Bloch 1971:180-182 for the *Merina* equivalent].

Layout and structure of the village: the development cycle

If we imagine a developing Household we can break down what is happening into two trends: sons moving out, gradually extending into the countryside with new Households forming and eventually breaking away from the parent Household; sons staying put, building-up a core nucleus around the parent Household itself on the original site. These two trends begin to allow us to see how villages are formed [cf Freeman 1958 on the development cycle of the Iban of Borneo]. Each time a son moves away the seed of a new village is sown. If the son is successful his homestead will flourish and grow. As his own sons grow up around him and build their houses nearby a hamlet is formed. If enough of them stay on, the number of descendants of the original founder will continue to increase until the place becomes recognised as a village [*tana*]. The creation of villages is like a chain-reaction across the countryside. However, the growth and continuing existence of villages is dependent on a degree of stasis/stagnation in this chain of development. A village can only sustain itself if a certain number of male descendants stay on. The tension between fathers and their sons implicit in this system is reminiscent of Graeber’s description of a similar scenario in *Imerina*:

“There was, and apparently has been, a radical contradiction between a father’s interest and that of his sons. As a result, generational politics largely amount to a politics of movement with fathers striving to keep their descendants from leaving and sons at least dreaming of being able to break away” [Graeber 1995:267].

What is clear is that the successful creation of a village to an extent depends on the selfish motivations and repressive actions of fathers. The result is that a village is a very dynamic ever-changing entity, depending for its survival on the determination of its senior generation

constituent members. The model of development given above is therefore of course idealistic; the practical realisation of the ideal is far more messy and complicated than the abstract theory. However the model is a close approximation of how the people of *Sahafatra* seem to understand the process of village creation themselves.

Homesteading and the ideal of imagined growth

Homesteading is initially about going it alone. The word for homestead [*kombohitra*] literally means a 'hill by itself' graphically illustrating how homesteading must involve starting afresh in a completely new place [cf Elli 1993:34⁸]. The isolation of a homestead means that one must be prepared to be a self-sufficient and independent entity; there are no other kin there to immediately help out. When the wife of the homesteader is ill; instead of being able to call in another female relative to do her work, the husband must himself be prepared to take over her tasks, regardless of the theoretical sexual division of labour. It is therefore not uncommon to see a man pounding and cooking rice (quintessential women's work) in these situations.

Iaban'i Zafitala is a man of the *Masitafika* clan who has started a homestead [*kombohitra*] a few kilometres from his natal village, *Bekomafa*. When *Iaban'i Zafitala* decided to move away he was already married and had several small children; his father was dead by this time. He built a strong new house on the top of hill situated between his parent village (*Bekomafa*, clan *Masitafika*) and the territory of his wife's clan, the neighbouring *Tevongo*. Initially a simple lean-to was built on the bare summit; later this was replaced by a sturdy full-size house. A raised granary [*trano-ambo*] was put up and a cattle pen erected. Banana plants [*akondro*] were planted around the nascent house and manioc [*kazaha*] put in on the surrounding hillsides. Fruit trees were planted near the house and coffee plants gradually introduced. Rights to use of existing rice paddies were still activated but new ones began to be constructed too.

At first *Iaban'i Zafitala's* house stood alone. He and his wife and small children all lived in the one large open-space of the house. His eldest daughter married out (to a *Tevongo* man) and left the homestead, and now only returns from time to time to visit with his new grand-child. His



From homestead to complete village

younger daughter is also looking to marry and will soon move away. However, the sons remain. As his sons grew older they began to construct their own basic lean-to shelters to sleep in a few paces away, slowly improving on them as time permitted. A year ago an outsider (not originally from the land of *Sahafatra*), who had been working on road construction in the area, decided to settle and asked permission to build a house on the same hill-top. So what was originally one primitive shelter has already developed into a little hamlet, basically made up of family but also encompassing 'tenant' incomers.

Through the act of moving away from his natal village *Iaban'i Zafitala* can see himself becoming more and more independent. Although he still admits that he must 'approach' [*manatona*] the parent village for ritual purposes he asserts that he is on the path to full autonomy [*efa mana zo iaho*]. *Iaban'i Zafitala* already thinks of himself as a local leader [*panjaka iaho*] and is regarded as such, being treated with deference at public events. He is already self-sufficient in practical terms (he no longer needs to beg cattle [*mangataka aomby*] from relatives to trample his rice fields, which is a common sign of dependency) and speaks with confidence at debates [*kabaro*]. Everyone, including himself, is confident that his settlement will turn into a village [*ho tana itiky*] and that his house will be officially transformed into a ceremonial Big-House in recognition of that fact. All that needs to happen is for the trend to continue, for more people to stay than to leave the hamlet.

In some contexts the people of *Sahafatra* imagine even more idealistic versions of how it could/should be. A village is imagined ideally as being the descendants of one man. *Iaban'i Zafitala* thinks of himself as the founder and pictures the generations beneath stemming from him. He lists the terminology for his descendants, tracing the imagined future line and the filling up of his village. He is the founder he explains, the father [*iaba*]; he has children [*anaky*] who have grandchildren [*zafy*], who have 'diminutive' grandchildren [*zafiafy*], who have 'knee-high' grandchildren [*zafindohalika*], who have 'ankle-high' grandchildren [*zafikitro*], who have 'sole-high' grandchildren [*zafim-paladia*], who have 'grandchildren he will never see' [*zafy-tsy-hita*]. By this time he says the village should be full up [*feno*] and he, even if he lives to be an ancient white-haired old man [*fotsy-volo*], will be dead. *Iaban'i Zafitala* sees himself as the 'head' [*loha*] of a string of descendants that grow and go to make up a 'body'. The passage of time and the

filling up of a village are measured in terms of moving down the generations and of moving down and filling out the 'body'. The terminology of filiation runs for seven generations, from head to toe if you like. When the cycle ends the 'body' is complete and the village full.

The metaphor of the 'body' can be understood in two ways. In one sense *Iaban'i Zafitala* is 'head' of everything; he is higher than his descendants and generates/encompasses them all. But in another complementary sense it is the descendants who fill up and make the 'body' he heads; he is constituted by his descendants [cf Feeley-Harnik 1982:45 for a *Sakalava* version where slaves make-up the royal body]. The tidy picture painted by *Iaban'i Zafitala* is not replicated on the ground. What he imagines and explains is a vision of how he would like it to be in a perfect world. He smiles ruefully as he tells his tale because he knows perfectly well that not all his male descendants will stay put and that his female descendants will most likely marry out⁹. But the image is not contaminated by reality because each time someone starts a homestead there is another opportunity to create the 'ideal' village. The idea of the perfect and uncontaminated evolution of a homestead into a fully-fledged village keeps the ideal alive¹⁰.

The reality of the village

The expectation for all daughters to marry out and for at least some sons to stay put means that villages should, in theory, basically consist of an agnatic descent group stemming from a founding Father. Many homesteads and nascent villages still represent this state of affairs. However most villages of long standing have a more complicated structure. The more complicated structure normally arises from the fact that separate descent groups (of the same clan) have at some time allied themselves with each other for the purposes of security. The recurrent and ever present threat of banditry [*dahalo/fahavalo*] and of inter-clan friction encouraged descent groups to aggregate together. Once sited on the same spot it was rare for there to be a wholesale move-on by any descent group. Young men from all the groups continued to nucleate outwards but the central core of the collected descent groups remained. In addition villages often incorporate 'outsiders': 'tenants', 'blood-brothers' [*fanange*], and subordinated men [cf Middleton 1988 on *Karembola* idioms of dependency] who come to live

in their wives' villages' [*lelahy tsy maharonga tena, mody am-biavy*] all find a place. As they generate descendants they also become members of the village community. In reality then villages tend to be based on an aggregation of agnatic descent groups, with a collected assortment of peripheral or subordinate households latching on.

The clans themselves have distinct territories but the agnatic descent groups within a clan do not. All the agnatic descent groups within a clan overlap and intermesh spatially with each other. Although some villages are recognised as strongholds of a particular descent group this does not mean that the village is comprised solely of members of that descent group. Almost all villages consist of a mixture of descent groups.

The make-up and membership of Big-Houses

The extended Household consists of a collection of houses centred on a parent house headed by a living Father. The extended Household is essentially a minimal agnatic descent group. As we have seen villages are likely to be made up of the cores of several of these extended Households. Each extended Household is part of a larger Family [*fianakavia*]. The word for family is obviously a flexible term that can be used to refer to a nuclear family, a household, a lineage or even a clan. However when discussing the constitution of a Big-House informants use the word for Family [*fianakavia*] as a technical term. In this technical sense Family consists of all the people who can trace descent through the male line back to the recognised founder of the Family, a man known as the Grandfather [*raibe/iababe*]. A whole Family, unlike a Household, does not congregate on a day to day basis but only on special occasions.

One, two or three of these Families go to make up what is known as a Big House. If there was just one founding Grandfather the Big-House will consist of one Family; if there were two founding Grandfathers the Big-House will consist of two Families; if there were three founding Grandfathers there will be three Families etc. The founding Grandfathers of each Big-House are said to be 'brothers' [*ampirahalahy*] to one another even though they may not in fact be real

brothers. Big-Houses are not traced back to a single founding ancestor as would likely be the case if these 'brother Grandfathers' always shared a common Father.

Although siblings within a nuclear family are normally ranked by age, the underlying idiom of sibling-hood is one of equality and substitutability [*azo soloana*]; the eldest brother is merely the first amongst equals. The important features held in common by real brothers is that they are all of the same generation and that they are all said to be of 'one belly' [*troky iray*], meaning that they were born of the same mother. Brothers are not always related through one father. Rather brothers are allies who should always support each other, an idea expressed by the belief that they should help each other trample their rice-fields [*mifanosy*]. It is the co-operative and egalitarian aspect of the relationship that is thought to apply to 'brother Grandfathers'. Thus the term 'brother' is here being used to demonstrate the equality of the Families rather than actual sibling-hood between the Grandfathers. Some Grandfathers may be real brothers (the Grandfathers of *Tatahira's* Big-House in *Bekomafa* (clan *Masitafika*) were for example real brothers that he could trace genealogically) but this is not a necessary requirement.

The Big-House of *Iaban'i Balery* in *Vohimary*, a *Masitafika* village, was said to have three Grandfathers: *Rafenitsara*, *Marovala* and *Mahafaly*. However nobody could genealogically place them as true brothers, or was particularly worried about being able to ¹¹. All that the members of the Big-House insisted on was that the Grandfathers were all descendants of an ancestress known as *Safoly*. What was important to them was some sense of common ancestral origin combined with recognition of the equality and separateness of each Family and the right of each Family to split off and form their own Big-House in the future. What is clear is that a Big House is as much the result of the pragmatic alliance of unrelated lineages in the past as it is of blood kinship. The Grandfathers of the past may have allied their Families for much the same security reasons as extended Households group together in villages now. However, unlike extended Households that simply exist in proximity to each other, Families symbolically place themselves under the one shared roof of a Big-House. The Big-House is an actual building as well as an idea. However it is not a specially designed, separate building only used for communal get-togethers. Rather it is the house of the person chosen to act as representative leader of the combined Families that is transformed into the Big-House.

Similarity and difference between a Household and a Big-House

Each Household is part of a wider Family (descendants of one Grandfather) which is attached to a Big-House. Membership of a Big-House, like the extended Household, is also in theory determined according to descent through the male line. However, unlike the Household in which membership is demonstrated by an agnatic link to one living Father, membership of a Big-House is shown by tracing a connection through men to one of two or three long dead founding 'Grandfathers' [*raibe/iababe*].

The surface similarity of the make-up of the Household and the make-up of the Big-House can lead to confusion. The fact that both are based on the aggregation of members of male descent groups makes it tempting to assume that the Big-House is just a big version of a Household. However as has been noted a Household is basically a genuine minimal descent group whereas a Big-House is several medium-sized descent groups (Families) artificially glued together to look like one maximal descent group. By being grouped symbolically under one Big-House roof they give the impression of being an over-sized Household when they are no such thing.

It is this 'confusion' that allows a strong sense of quasi-kinship to be developed, bonding together the Families and all the members of the Big-House. By presenting the Big-House as a normal house that just happens to be big all the real-life messiness of Big-House membership is obscured; unity and common origins are emphasised while diversity and differentiation are down-played. This is why the members of the Big-House are known as those of One House [*trano-iray*]. This gives the impression that everyone originally stemmed from a single Household, whatever the real fact of the matter might be.

Leadership and nature of the Big-House

Each Big-House has one leader who is known as the Minder of the One House [*piambina*¹² *trano iray*]. The One House referred to is one and the same with the Big-House which, as has been noted, symbolises the putative common origin of all those affiliated to it. The Minder of the One

House lives in the Big-House. This does not mean that there is one Big-House that each new leader moves to in turn; rather whatever house the new leader is living in is transformed into a Big-House. If his current home is not large enough communal work will be undertaken to construct a suitably sized Big-House nearby. This work often takes up to a year (we watched one new Big-House in *Vohimary*, capital and ritual centre of the *Antsoro* clan, painstakingly take shape through the whole 16 months fieldwork) and serves to make clear who are the committed, contributory members of the Big-House group. So, although the concept of what the Big-House consists of is clear and enduring, the actual physical manifestation is temporary and transferable.

The Minder of the One House, who can be from any of the constituent Families, represents all the Families. As his title suggests he is a type of 'caretaker' [*piambina*] who is responsible for various ritual and practical duties concerning all the members of the Big-House. Unlike the Household Head [*iaba*] who is a permanent 'given', there by virtue of his position as Father and genitor, the Minder of the One House is not an automatic choice and his position is temporary and conditional on satisfactory performance. Although the position of Minder of the One House is often inherited according to descent criteria (the closest and most senior male relative of the previous leader) this is not always the case. If the most obvious candidate is thought of as unsuitable (for reasons to be gone into later) an alternative candidate will be selected by the subjects instead. 'They must be chosen' [*fidina sinitra*], it is said. As the people insist, and as is clearly the case in practice, an element of choice [*safidy*] has entered the equation. This should not entirely surprise readers familiar with the literature on Madagascar; Beaujard, for example, in his account of the development of *Tanala* royal structures records the evolution of an elective system whereby certain types of *panjaka* can be chosen [Beaujard 1983a:321]. What is interesting is that his material echoes the *Sahafatra* case in that not all *panjaka*, but only certain types of *panjaka*, may be chosen.

The Big-House is not just an abstract idea; it also exists as a physical structure [for comparative regional literature on Big-Houses cf Beaujard 1983b:226-231; Thomas 1996]. The Big-House is built to the same specifications/design as an ordinary house but, not surprisingly, it is exceptionally large in comparison. In theory it should be able to fit, at a squeeze, all the adult male members inside; if it cannot pressure will start to mount for a reconstruction. The Big-

House must be lived in by its leader. When a Big-House is out of action, abandoned or not being lived in by the Minder of the One House, two of the hearth stones [*tokom-bavy roa*] (which are thought of as female) are removed; only a single hearth stone [*tokon-dahy iray avao*] (thought of as male) is left in place [cf Thomas 1995:342 for the reverse *Temanambondro* scenario where the single stone is female]. This state of affairs continues until a leader once again takes residence. The Big-House is thus essentially an ordinary home, as symbolised by the three hearth stones. However the Big-House also acts as a focus for its constituent Families: it serves as a centre for rituals, as a meeting place for debates, as the accepted place to entertain strangers to the village, and as the site for laying out the newly dead bodies of ordinary members of the Families. So, although the Big-House is based on the model of an everyday house, it is not only bigger but it also serves different and more public/communal purposes. Public and private worlds are combined within its precincts.

The existence of the Big-House as an actual building makes membership of the Big-House more inclusive than is suggested by the abstract criteria discussed previously. The Big-House is like the Household where, as we have seen, real membership comes through taking part in Household activities as well as through patrilineal relations. Big-House membership does not only or necessarily depend on considerations of accurately traced descent; what counts for membership is a demonstration of allegiance towards a particular Big-House and participation in the activities centred on it. This involves paying ones contributions in money and labour to the construction and upkeep of the Big-House, attending and taking part in ceremonies, playing a role in public debates, taking ones problems to be sorted out there and so on. This means that in reality inclusion in a Family and a Big-House is far more open than the strict definition allows for.

The Fertile/Big-House conceptual divide

As we have seen each Minder of the One House is the head of a sacralised building known as the Big House [*trano-be*]. It is important to note, however, that this culturally supercharged house is also commonly referred to as the '*lonaky*' which literally means 'Fertile'. The people of *Sahafatra* themselves refer to sacralised houses interchangeably as either Big-Houses [*trano-be*]



From the framework of a Big-House/Fertile to an actual house of sacrifice

or Fertiles [*lonaky*]. They use both terms liberally and do not differentiate between them according to context. My usage will differ from this in that I will use each term to purposefully convey different and contrasting aspects of the sacralised house. It must be remembered that this is an artificial separation on my part designed to demonstrate clearly that the authority of the Minder of the One House stems from two different sources. I intend to use these two terms advisedly in order to convey the different roles the building plays in constructing people's competing mental models of authority: one based on order, alignment and inheritance (the idioms used to express patrilineal descent relations), and the other on centres and fertility (alternative idioms which run contrary to patrilineal descent, concentrating on the importance of houses and their undifferentiated constituent members) . In real life no such distinction is made. In fact the lack of actual distinction is critical to the construction of a complex structure of authority: it allows these two different types of authority to be combined and confabulated instead of being opposed.

The Big-House aspect

When one refers to the Big House one is talking about the collection of households that go to constitute it and which are oriented towards it. A Big House consists of a collection of Families in theory related to each other by a patrilineal connection at some point in the past. In a sense then the Big House is simply a symbolic house (one that happens to be big) containing a huge extended family sharing a putative distant ancestor; it is an extrapolation of the ordinary household and of the rules that operate within it. In the same way as there are proper sitting arrangements within the house, so there should be an appropriate spatial arrangement of the constituent houses towards the Big House. The theory is that constituent Households should be to the South and West of the Big-House, leaving the Big-House positioned (relative to them) to the privileged North and East. Although this is clear in theory it does not work out that way in practice. This is the point where the similarities between house and Big House begin to go awry. People pay lip service to relative positioning but it is not an overriding priority. The fact is that it is hard for this mode of organisation to be realised on the ground. For many villages there is simply no room on the hilltop sites to create the required pretty abstract patterns; neither can

people who move away to homestead afford to choose land according to such criteria. What we end up with as a result is a far more random arrangement with the Big House approximately at the centre.

Relative location should speak of the place a Household occupies in terms of seniority but the actual state of affairs is a recognition that the 'proper' alignment of houses (symbolizing and marking out the correct patrilineal descent relations) is not necessarily the be all and end all of spatial organisation. The consequence of this is that in many villages two or three Fertiles may be lined up with each other to form a core nucleus around which everything else is aggregated in a semi-random manner.

The Fertile aspect

I use the term 'Fertile' because it is the best translation I can think of that conveys people's attitude towards the building, which, because of what it is, the events that go on inside it and their associations, is thought of as in some sense generative. The notion that the building contributes to the common good is supported by the fact that repairs to, and the building of new sacralised houses is communal work undertaken and funded willingly by constituent members [cf Bloch 1971:105-137 on *Merina* tomb construction and maintenance; also cf Feeley-Harnik 1986:164-173 on *Sakalava* 'fanompoana', royal service].

The idea of generative power is also captured by the other uses of the word '*lonaky*'. Apart from referring to the sacralised building itself it is most commonly used when talking about the land and, slightly less often, women. When people are looking at a particularly productive rice-paddy or hill-side they will often say with great satisfaction that the land is fertile [*lonaky izany tany mamokatra*]. Similarly when they are commenting on a woman who has borne many children they might say that she is fertile [*lonaky ny viavy*]. What is curious is that a basically adjectival word meaning 'fertile' is being used as a noun denoting a sacralised building. It is as if the idea of fertility is actually tied up with the building and what it stands for; as if the building is in some sense an objectification of, and focus for, different types of fertility. This combination of

different types of fertility in an object is compounded by the fact that the head of the sacralised building is also indirectly called '*lonaky*' (because the building is alternatively known as the 'house of the *lonaky*' [*tranon-donaky*]). He is also an objectification of fertility.

This suggests that the fertility of the land and the people is inseparable from and intimately involved with both the building and its leader. This complex interdependency of different types of fertility is an issue I will develop through the thesis; for the moment, it suffices to say that the sacralised building is not simply a mundane house, but is rather a culturally charged source of fertility. When the house is being treated as a 'centre' it is far more appropriate to use the term Fertile to describe it [cf Errington 1989:64-135 on centrist politics and the leader as the "navel of the world"]. This is the alternative idiom. The house is a centre for outward growth, a town centre, and also an attractive pole for outsiders to latch on to [cf Errington 1989:26 on society "organised around a central vital point"]. Membership in this world is far more hazy than that in theory allowed by the Big House concept. The stability and order of the Big House idea provides the fixed point, the framework to allow another type of institutional organism to come into being [cf Errington 1989:233-243 on the general nature of house societies].

The house attracts a great number of people [cf Errington 1989:108-109 on how it is more important to control people than territory in southeast Asia], and the greater the assembled body of subjects the more undifferentiated they become, so much so that they are likened to a mass of water [*rano*]. Instead of choosing a leader simply according to the dictums and structures of the house (which privilege patrilineal descent relations) different criteria begin to come into play. An element of choice is introduced; the people must choose for themselves [*tsy maintsy mifidy ny fokon'olo*]. When a new leader is needed, instead of it being a simple matter of descent, a consensus must be reached by the members of the Fertile as to who should 'inherit' [*mandova*] the mantle of authority. I put 'inherit' in inverted commas because the role is not in fact necessarily inherited in the obvious sense; ie by the closest relative. If the logical genealogical choice (the brother or the eldest son of the incumbent) is deemed unsuitable another candidate can be substituted in his place. Genealogy alone is not necessarily determinant in the selection process.

This, then, is the water-shed between Fathers and Minders of the One House in the authority system. The Fathers' authority is based simply on the prioritisation of patrilineal descent relations, expressed through the alignment of houses and the 'correct' ordering [*ambaratonga*] of people. In contrast the Minders' authority is based on his 'selection' by his subjects. As we move up the structure of authority there is a partial transformation in the way power is transmitted. At the bottom of the hierarchy there is a 'traditional' (in Weberian terms) system where inherited power travels down the male line; further up the hierarchy we discover a new system which is to some extent defined by the public will and in which considerations of descent are not paramount. As one ascends the hierarchy then descent credentials count for less and the charismatic qualities of the candidates for leadership come more into play.

The court of the senior *panjaka*

Evidence for the existence of a new type of authority is provided by the changing nature of social relations found within the Fertile, compared to that found within the ordinary house. In many senses the Fertile is like a royal court. I introduce the idea of a court for three reasons: the house of the *panjaka* is a type of palace; it is a ritual centre and the place that orders are given from; the senior *panjaka* should stay put in his house and the people should come to him; he holds court so to speak; in their official capacity senior *panjaka* never sit alone but have a number of people (courtiers) to assist and protect them.

As I have stated, the Big-Houses of Minders of the One House and Earth-Shakers (even more senior leaders; to be introduced in the following section) are also known as Fertiles. The term Fertile [*lonaky*], by extension, also means 'royal palace' because it is the ruling figures who are thought of as sources of fertility. 'Royal palace' may be a rather grandiose term and misnomer for what is often a rather dilapidated palm-hut but it does convey the critical truth that a senior *panjaka* must live in a Fertile, and that a Fertile is only a Fertile if it is inhabited by a senior *panjaka*. People insist on this fact and use the evidence that someone does not live in a Fertile to demonstrate incontrovertibly that they are not a senior *panjaka*. This proved to be the case for the President of the *Dina Sahafatra*, *Iaban'i Fano* (clan *Antsoro*), who was a very conceited and

self important character. He initially presented himself to us as a senior *panjaka*. It was only when we reported this to other people and they burst out laughing at the unashamed and bare-faced nature of the lie that we realised we had been taken in. As was pointed out to us, *Iaban'i Fano* could not possibly be mistaken for a *panjaka* (however much he desired to be) because he did not live in a Fertile [*lonaky*]. He liked to style himself as a *panjaka* because he felt he ought to be recognised as one. However, no-one else accepted his vain self-aggrandisement; instead they found it comic and ridiculous.

For our present purposes it is enough to recognise that the Palace and the senior *panjaka* are conceptually inseparable. Consequently the man as well as the building is regarded as a ritual centre of fertility. The combination of the two form an immovable centre [cf McKinnon 1991:274-276 on static nobles in the Tanimbar islands] that must be approached [*manatona*] by the subjects when they have a problem or take part in a ceremony. So each Big-House/Fertile is a seat of power representing in a sense the 'palace' of the resident senior *panjaka*. Within this 'palace' the senior *panjaka* holds court. In so doing he is related to people in a way that is different to that found in ordinary household relations; he is not just surrounded by family as such but by 'courtiers' who have particular roles to play. When strangers approach or subjects petition the senior *panjaka* he must have a spokesman [*mason-drano*] and a bodyguard [*vady voin-donaky*] present with him. On formal ceremonial occasions the whole court must be assembled. In addition to the spokesman and the bodyguard the senior *panjaka's* wife (known in these circumstances as the 'royal woman' [*ampela hova*]) must be there; so must all the junior *panjaka*; so must all the people who stand in the relation of sister's son [*zanak'anakavy*] to the senior *panjaka*; so must the Taster; and so must the subjects. For the purposes of clarity I briefly introduce the members of the court; several of the characters discussed below will re-appear later in the thesis.

The mass of subjects and the Eye of the Water

The subjects are thought of as an undifferentiated mass of people. They are described by fairly indeterminate terms: '*lonaky iray*' [people of one Fertile], '*fianakavia iray*' [people of one

family], ‘*fokon’olo*’ [council]. Most importantly, however, they are thought of as a mass of water [*rano*]. The full implications of this will be discussed in Chapter 7. For the time being it is enough to know that this ‘water’ (the subjects) is a volatile and powerful force to be reckoned with.

A senior *panjaka* never sits alone in official situations. He must always be accompanied by his spokesman who is known as the ‘*mason-drano*’ which means ‘eye of the water’. The Eye of the Water is in a tricky position; he is the spokesman, mouthpiece [*solombava*] and adviser to the *panjaka* but he is also the representative of the people. He is the intermediary between the ruler and his subjects. The Eye of the Water speaks for the senior *panjaka* who is meant, on the whole, to be silent (for reasons that will become apparent later) but he is also meant to carry the wishes of the people. The Eye of the Water is not an inherited position; he is chosen by the members of the Big-House [*trano iray*]. Neither does his position necessarily mark him out as a future *panjaka*; he will not automatically be selected as a successor. He has been chosen for a particular role that he has been judged suitable for, and no more.

Closer analysis of the title ‘Eye of the Water’ helps explain the nature of the role and how the ‘eye’ works. As informants pointed out the Eye of the Water is both one and the same with the people because both are water [*mitovy fa samy rano*]. And yet he is also different, removed from them, because he is their spokesman [*vavan-olo*], their eye [*nefa hafa fa mason-olo izy*]. Like a drop of water in a pool he is separate and indistinguishable at the same time. If the people are the water he is the critical drop of water. He is the eye that is able to see in both directions, communicating the wishes of the people to the *panjaka* and vice versa. He is the agent and the focus of the mass. He is also an intermediary buffer [*olo anivo*] between the ruler and the subjects to guard against the overwhelming potency and potentially harmful fierceness of the *panjaka*.

The Eye of the Water must read the mind of the largely mute *panjaka* in order to speak correctly without the need for the *panjaka* to intervene. This is why the Eye of the Water is also referred to as the close ‘friend’ [*nama*] of the *panjaka*; he and the *panjaka* must be able to ‘understand each other well’ [*mifankahazo tsara*] without oral communication. It is the Eye of the Water who

fields questions, not explicitly conferring with the *panjaka* but just glancing up at him nervously to gauge if he is doing right. This mind reading is achieved through eye contact. The Eye of the Water is forever turning between the *panjaka* and the people he is addressing, looking for confirmation and approval from both directions. This constant checking and appraisal of the situation in part explains his name. It was explained to me how eyes are not only tools for seeing; they are also thought of as pools that screen the emotions of the owner [*tsy manety avao ny maso fa mampiseho fihetsem-po koa*]. Thus eyes allow you not only to see but also to be 'seen'. The Eye of the Water is therefore an eye in several senses. He is an eye that can see the will of the people; he is an eye that can screen their desires, thereby representing the people; he is an eye that can interpret the reaction of the *panjaka*; he is an eye that can convey that reaction back to the people.

Protector and substitute: the 'wife of misfortune'

A senior *panjaka* will also have a type of guardian protector who should accompany him wherever he goes [cf Beaujard 1983a:324 for similar ideas of how *Tanala panjaka* should be protected]. This man should be trustworthy [*azo atokisa*], reliable and strong. He is likened to a bodyguard [*garde de corps*] and is known as the '*vady vain-donaka*'. This title contains at least two elements of meaning. In one sense it could be translated as Wife of the Fertile suggesting the weddedness and connection of the title-holder to the sacred house and all it represents. Bearing in mind the inseparability of the Fertile and the senior *panjaka* the Wife of the Fertile is also in a sense wedded to the *panjaka*; it is therefore the job of the Wife of the Fertile to behave like a male wife, tending to the needs of the *panjaka*. In another sense however the title means 'wife of misfortune' (literally '*voina*' means 'reason' but people always explained it in terms of necessity brought on by bad luck). What this is getting at is that the *panjaka* may, through misfortune, become indisposed (ie ill, dead or elsewhere) and the Wife of Misfortune will have to stand in as a temporary replacement. The '*vady vain-donaka*' plays both roles: he is protector, carer and potential substitute. He is known by many alternative terms among the different clans, such as '*lefitra*' [lieutenant], '*adjoint*' [assistant], '*anak-hova*' [noble], '*anak-andria*' [noble], and '*komandeo*' [commander] ¹³.

The Royal Woman and the Taster

The real wife of a senior *panjaka* also has a very important position in the ‘court’. When the *panjaka* is ‘raised up’ his wife officially becomes the ‘*ampela-hova*’, the Royal Woman [cf McKinnon 1991:261-265 on women’s adopted rank]. As the *panjaka* becomes the ‘Father of the People’ [*iaban’olo aby*] so his wife becomes ‘Mother of the People’ [*endrin’olo aby*]. As ‘Mother of the People’ the Royal Woman has certain responsibilities and certain privileges [cf Beaujard 1983a:331 on the *Tanala* ‘Princess of the Sky’]. The people are her ‘children’; she is therefore senior to them but has an obligation to look after their welfare. This must be expressed through empathy and generosity. Thus if a madman goes by wearing no clothes, the Mother of the People must give him some clothes. If she does not she risks going mad [*molamola*] herself because she has not fulfilled the obligations of a mother. In recognition of her position the Royal Woman is excused work in some contexts. She maintains her honour by not working in front of strangers [*vahiny*], delegating [*mambo-draha*] to other women instead. Most notably she is excused working at circumcisions [*fora*], funerals [*fahafatesa*], and at the Black Wine and ‘raising up’ ceremonies [to be described later].

The couple are paired together in a way that ordinary husbands and wives never are. This is demonstrated most vividly by the fact that they sit beside one another on ritual occasions in a way that spouses never normally do. At ritual occasions the Royal Woman is allowed to wear a special type of reed hat known as a ‘*sartroka batrelaky*’. This hat, which has 4 red diamond-shaped marks in the middle of the sides like an *Antaimoro* hat, singles her out amongst women but also serves to pair her with her *panjaka* husband who also wears special identifying headgear [*soto mena*]. Their complementary headgear matches them together and plays a particularly important role at the ‘raising up’ ceremony of the *panjaka*, which will be discussed later.

In a sense the Royal Woman is a partner in power. However she does not rule in the same way as her husband. We showed the boys from *Bekomafa* pictures of Queen Elizabeth II. They were most interested that she was ‘raised up’ too and that she had a crown of gold [*sartroka volamena*]. However they did not accept the term ‘*panjakavavy*’ [female *panjaka*] that we gave to her; they assumed we meant Royal Woman [*ampela-hova*] which is what they insisted on

calling her. Essentially, then, the Royal Woman only rules through her husband and is symbolically incorporated by him. She is 'Mother of the People' and he is 'Father of the People' but he is also 'Father and Mother of the People'. She is associated with all the people but only has any authority over women; he has authority over men and women, incorporating her realm into his own.

When visiting a senior *panjaka* it is appropriate to take a small consumable tribute (normally wine [*divay*] or rum [*toaka*]). However since the preferred method of sorcery in the land of *Sahafatra* is through poisoning a Taster is needed to sample the gift first and then to serve the drinks to everyone in the room in an appropriate hierarchical order. At every occasion in the Big-House there will be a young man to act as Taster¹⁴. Ideas about the court will be elaborated on later in the thesis. At this point it is merely important to see that the Fertile/Big-House is not just a house but a centre of royalty and all those implicated by that royalty

Families of Big-Houses

The structure of a single Big-House and its similarity to a court has been outlined above. This, however, is not the apex of the hierarchy. Big-Houses are important entities in themselves but they are also building blocks in a larger structure. It is this larger structure that I outline now. Big-Houses are not all of the same type. Each Big-House is affiliated to one of the Great Ancestors [*razam-be*] of each clan. These Great Ancestors are thought of as the clan founders in the land of *Sahafatra*. In the public imagination each Great Ancestor created and headed an original Big-House in the region. All the Big-Houses of today are said to have stemmed from the initial few Big-Houses belonging to the Great Ancestors.

The proliferation of the number of Big-Houses is the result of Big-Houses having given birth [*naterahana*] to other Big-Houses. When a Big-House is 'born' of another Big-House it retains the identity of the parent house ie it remains affiliated to the same lineage and same Great Ancestor. The result is that the different types of Big-House existing today represent different lineages stemming from different Great Ancestors. The Big-Houses are effectively divided up

into what I shall call Families of Big-Houses; each Family of Big-Houses being thought of as the issue of a Great Ancestor. The members of a Family of Big-Houses are known as people of One Belly [*troky iray*]. A clan is made-up of several Families of Big-Houses (depending on the number of Great Ancestors it has) and is therefore said to consist of a certain number of Bellies. For example if there are 4 Great Ancestors then there are 4 Families of Big-Houses and the clan is said to have Four Bellies [*efatra troky*].

In theory all the Big-Houses are descended from one of the Great Ancestors. However, this is just 'theory' because the system allows for the incorporation of later incoming groups [for similar data about incorporation into clans in Zimbabwe cf Lan 1985: 25]. As long as they affiliate themselves to one of the Great Ancestors they can become part of the clan. Though not readily apparent this is what has in fact happened in many cases. The difficulty of discovering such cases stems from the fact that they are well hidden. It is not therefore surprising that the first case I found, I stumbled upon by accident. I was a guest in the Big-House of *Iaban'i Balery* in *Vohimary* (a *Masitafika* village) and happened to ask him which of the three *Masitafika* Great Ancestors he was related to. After a brief pause he said he was descended from Great Ancestor *Renifatsy*. Slightly suspicious of the hesitation I asked if he might trace his descent line. He was not unwilling, but revealed that the four Big-Houses in his village actually thought of *Andrevolo* as their founding ancestor. Now *Andrevolo* is not one of the official recognised Great Ancestors of the *Masitafika*; after further questioning it emerged that neither was *Andrevolo* connected by any known genealogical route to *Renifatsy*. So what was going on? I was confused. It appeared that these people were not related to *Renifatsy* in any way. Wanting to clarify the matter I asked if members of his Big-House were buried in the *Renifatsy* communal tomb. Sure enough, they were not, but had their own separate tomb [*kibory*]. This was incontrovertible proof that these people did not think of themselves as true descendants of *Renifatsy*, but had merely affiliated themselves to him. The above case demonstrates how clans do not consist just of descendants of original Great Ancestors; they also incorporate incoming groups who place themselves under a 'flag of convenience'. Clans may present themselves as pure descent groups but to an extent they are simply aggregations of incoming people willing to pay allegiance to a fictitious (as far as they are concerned) ancestor.

Leaders of Families of Big-Houses

So Families of Big-Houses are constituted through affiliation as well as descent. However, whatever route one takes to become an accepted member of a Belly one is ruled over by the same type of person regardless. As each individual Big-House has a leader, the Minder of the One House, so each Family of Big-Houses must have a designated leader too.

All the members of the Family of Big-Houses choose ¹⁵ a more senior leader, known as the ‘*kobatany*’, from amongst their own number to head their Belly. The element of free choice involved in the decision is particularly stressed; in theory any adult male affiliated to the appropriate Great Ancestor can be selected as the ‘*kobatany*’, whether he be a Minder of the One House or an ordinary citizen [*olo-tsotra*] ¹⁶. Once chosen the ‘*kobatany*’ has authority over all the members of all the Big-Houses that go to make-up the Family of Big-Houses.

Each clan has several ‘*kobatany*’, the exact number being in precise accordance with the number of Families of Big-Houses (Bellies). For example, if there are three Bellies there must be three ‘*kobatany*’. These ‘*kobatany*’, like Minders of the One House, each rule from a Fertile. However these Fertiles are each the most senior out of all those that go to constitute each respective Belly and, in a ritual and hierarchical sense, subsume all the others within the set. This is part of the reason why the ‘*kobatany*’ are said to ‘rule the land’ [*mandidy tany*]; their authority quite literally extends over a large territory.

However they also ‘rule the land’ in a different, non-juristic, way. Their title actually refers to ‘agitated land’ [*koba(ka) + tany*] hinting at an active relationship with the land itself. I have therefore decided to call them Earth-Shakers, which is how I shall refer to them from here onwards. By adopting this term I intend to give the impression not only of figures who ‘rule the land’ but also of people who are intimately involved with its productive processes. In large part this thesis is an attempt to show that the Earth-Shakers rule their subjects by virtue of their ability to harness and amplify the life-giving fertility of the land.

The most senior in the land

In everyday life the Earth-Shakers of one clan are said to be equivalent to one another, equal in rank and power, each with jurisdiction over his own people. However in the final instance and on certain occasions the Earth-Shakers within a clan are ranked. One Earth-Shaker is singled out as senior to all the rest. This is due to recognition of the fact that he is descended from the most senior Great Ancestor.

In addition to his title of Earth-Shaker this man is also known as the 'Elder Brother of the People' [*zokin'olo*], 'Grandfather' [*iababe*], 'Old Man' [*rangahy*], and perhaps most exceptionally as the 'Old Woman' [*ranavavy*]. When there is need to single one person out as the most senior Earth-Shaker of a clan I will refer to him as the 'Old Woman' as this is the only term that would never be applied to any of the other leaders.

The Old Woman rules from a Fertile also. His Fertile, however, is the most sacred of all the clan Fertiles and must be situated in the ritual centre or capital [*renivohitra*] of the clan territory. This Fertile encompasses all the other clan Fertiles. As we have noted each Earth-Shaker can be said to rule over a large territory (that defined by his subjects); the Old Woman, who symbolically combines all these enmeshed territories under one mantle of authority, can truly be said, by extension, to 'rule the land'.

This is the idiom used to express the clan seniority of the Old Woman. However this seniority is largely ritual as each Earth-Shaker essentially has jurisdiction over his own people. Even when there is a communal decision affecting the whole clan the Earth-Shakers meet as a council to reach a consensus decision. It is only when agreement cannot be reached that the Old Woman has the final say. The Old Woman has an important ritual role. His presence at public ceremonies is vital for the well-being of all the clan and there are loud complaints and recriminations when he fails to turn up. Similarly there is great anxiety if he is reported ill. He is the most senior of the clan and as a sort of totemic father figure he is also the most duty-bound.

Continuities and breakages in the multi-level authority system

I have tried to make clear the basic structure of the system of authority that the people of *Sahafatra* operate. I have gone through the structure at an abstract level but in order to be clear I shall recap and use one particular clan as a concrete example. First of all a recap of the overall make-up of *Sahafatra* is necessary. The people of *Sahafatra* consist of a collection of about 13 clans centred around the town of *Vondrozo* in southeast Madagascar. Each of these clans essentially forms an independent entity; no clan is subordinate to any other clan, each clan governing itself. Although as I have said the clans are independent of one another the structure of their hierarchies are essentially the same. Not only is the theoretical hierarchy the same, so are the means of constructing and maintaining that system. The underlying values that make the system satisfying to the majority of the participants are shared by all the clans. So what we have in *Sahafatra* is a patchwork of neighbouring clans, running their own territory but operating parallel structures of authority (parallel symbolically as well as practically). The similarity of the set-up makes the clans comparable to each other and of great interest to each other. Having pointed out that the structures of authority are essentially the same for all the clans I will in fact outline that structure with reference to just one clan for the purpose of simplicity and clarity. The clan I have selected is that of the *Masitafika* who inhabit an area immediately to the northeast and southeast of *Vondrozo*.

The structure of authority of the *Masitafika*, a clan of the people of *Sahafatra*

The *Masitafika* live spread across the countryside in the vicinity of the small town of *Vondrozo*. They number about 2000 people and think of themselves as having 8 major villages. Each member of the clan is attached to a Household [*trano*] normally headed by his or her father. Each Household [*trano*] is headed by a man who has authority over his wife and children who reside with him. There are probably about 300 *Masitafika* Households ranging in size from simple husband/wife pairs to large families of around 20 people. For the sake of simplicity I refer to a Household as if it is physically one house when this may not in fact be the case: as sons break away from their fathers they build their own small houses but are still in some senses

subordinate to the house of their father and subsumed by it. There is no one moment of breakage between father and son but rather a gradual separation which forms part of the development cycle of Households. So when I use the term Household I am actually referring to a collection of houses still under the active authority of the father. The head of the Household is known as the Father [*iaba*].

All Households form part of a larger Family [*fianakavia*]. One, two or three Families are combined to form a Big-House. All the members of those Families are attached to the Big-House. The *Masitafika* have 28 Big-Houses. On average a Big-house will have about 10 Households attached to it. However the range of the number of Households attached to a Big-House is large; some newly formed Big-Houses may have only a couple of dependent Households whereas the oldest and most well established Big-House may have as many as 60 households 'under' it. Membership of a Big-House is according to descent through the male line. Sons and daughters become members of the same Big-House as their Father who has in turn followed the path of his own Father. This ascending path is traced upwards to one of the founding ancestors of the Big-House known as a Grandfather [*raibe / iababe*]. There may be up to 2 or 3 founding ancestors or Grandfathers who are said to be 'brothers'. So all present day members of a Big-House are descendants through the male line of one of the founding Grandfathers. The Grandfathers are regarded as 'brothers' and are symbolic heads for the separate Families.

Each Big-House therefore consists of what are regarded as several extended Families grouped together under one symbolic roof. The Big-House is a more inclusive version of the ordinary Households that go to make it up. It is more inclusive in that it extends over more generations and in that it includes more than one Family. The Household aggregates members of one male descent group; the Big-House on the other hand may involve the aggregation of more than one male descent group. In addition to this difference the criteria for entry into a Big-House group are less strictly adhered to than that for a Household. Due to its size a Big-House has more capacity for adoption and inclusion and obfuscation than a simple Household. So each Household consists of a man (the Father) and his dependents. If there are 300 Households then there are 300 Fathers. All Fathers (plus their Households) are attached to one of the 28 Big-

Houses. Each Big-House is lead by someone selected from amongst the Fathers who head the Households that constitute it. Each leader is known as the Minder of the One House and lives in and heads the Big-House. There are 28 Big-Houses for the *Masitafika* and thus there are 28 Minders of the One House.

Big-Houses are however not all of the same type. There are 3 types of Big-House for the *Masitafika* each representing a different lineage stemming from a different Great Ancestor [*razam-be*]. According to the *Masitafika* there were originally only 3 Big-Houses, one for the *Andrambaharoy* lineage, one for the *Andrahamoky* lineage and one for the *Renifatsy* lineage. All the Big-Houses today are descended from these and in the sense that they were born out of a certain Big-House they retain that identity. So all the 28 Big-Houses can be classified as one of these three types and are in fact divided into three distinct groups, three Families of Big-Houses if you like. Each of these three groups chooses a senior leader from amongst their own number to head their Family of Big-Houses. Each of these leaders is known as the Earth-Shaker [*kobatany*] and each is said to rule the land. In everyday life these 3 Earth-shakers are said to be equivalent to each other and equal in power; they are cast as brothers [*ampirahalahy*]. However in the final instance they are ranked according to their genealogical closeness to the original *Masitafika* ancestor in *Sahafatra*, *Ramahafasa*. The *Renifatsy* (headed by *Tsaninena/Iaban'i Vily*) are thought of as the youngest brother [*faran-daza; zandry*]; the *Andrahamoky* (headed by *Maurice/Zaman'i Bamanjary*) as the middle brother [*anivo*]; and the *Andrambaharoy* (headed by *Iaban'i Berlet*) as the eldest [*zokin'olo*].

As the youngest the *Renifatsy* are the most junior lineage. However they are thought of as a favourite and spoiled son [*tian'ny iaba sy ny endry*] and gain much power through cunning and through deceiving by flattery [*aroboy*]. The *Andrahamoky*, the middle lineage, are thought to be strong and warlike and are thought of as the fighting force [*miaramila*] and protectors [*piaro*] of the clan. The *Andrambaharoy* as the eldest lineage are the most senior and are thought of as wise and stable. They have the right to correct and rebuke [*mananatra*] the other lineages if they step out of line [*laha diso*]. The result of these perceptions is that the Earth-shaker of the *Andrambaharoy* Family of Big-Houses is regarded, in the final instance, as senior to the other two. In addition to his title of Earth-shaker he is also known as the Old Woman.

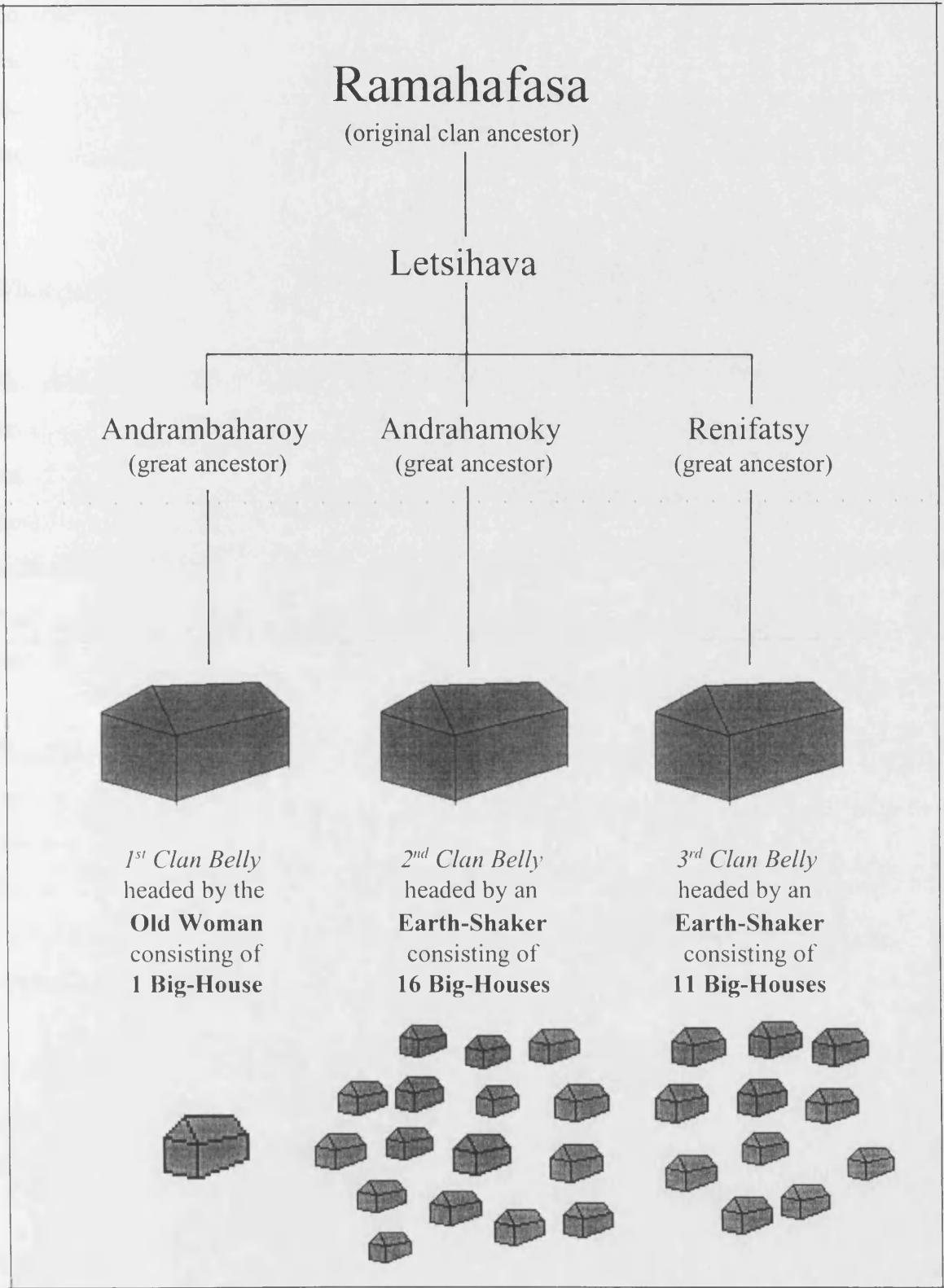


Figure 4: structure of the Masitafika clan

To sum up: 300 Fathers head 300 Households; all Households are attached to one of 28 Big-Houses, each Big-House being headed by a Minder of the One House; all Big-Houses belong to one of 3 ranked Families of Big-Houses, each Family of Big-Houses being headed by an Earth-shaker; of the 3 Earth-shakers the leader of the *Andrambaharoy* is singled out as the most senior and is referred to as the Old Woman.

What are *panjaka* and how do they fit into the structure?

The structure of authority has now been outlined but one critical term remains to be properly developed: that of the *panjaka*. The term is critical not just because it is theoretically important but also because the people of *Sahafatra* are obsessed with the idea of *panjaka* and the role that *panjaka* play in their lives. To be a *panjaka* is to have a loosely defined role precisely because to be a *panjaka* is in some sense simply to rule over others; to have a *panjaka* is to have a leader. A *panjaka* may demand fealty, his existence may impinge on your personal freedom but he provides reassurance, security and ‘fertility’ in an uncertain world.

This broad understanding of what it is to be a *panjaka* means that many different types of leader fall into the category of *panjaka*. *Panjaka* come in all shapes, sizes and forms. I have concentrated on the three major, high profile variants of *panjaka*: Fathers, Minders of the One House, and Earth-Shakers. The fact that these three very different types of leader are all classified as *panjaka* helps us begin to understand the diverse nature and overwhelming importance of *panjaka* in *Sahafatra* society. At every level, from simple Household activities to clan decisions, people’s lives are affected by *panjaka*. Everyone has a Father (who is a type of *panjaka*); everyone is under the authority of a Minder of the One House (who is a type of *panjaka*); everyone is subject to the power of an Earth-Shaker (who is a type of *panjaka*); and all are beholden to the Old Woman (who is a type of *panjaka*).

People are concerned about *panjaka* because the performance and activities of *panjaka* really matter; they are ‘lost’ without them [*laha ts’isy panjaka da very ny vahoaka*]. *Panjaka* are implicated in all the practical and ritual duties of life in *Sahafatra*. Life without *panjaka* is

inconceivable because there must always be a leader [*tsy maintsy misy loha*], a ‘head’ to turn to [cf Feeley-Harnik 1986:164 for comparative data on Malagasy *Sakalava* royal leaders as ‘heads’].

Endnotes

1. To court [*mifapila*] involves the boy giving little gifts to his 'girlfriend' [*sipa*] such as small amounts of money, plastic jewellery or a ring. If a girl is wearing a ring it does not signify that she is married but that a boy is interested in her; people will ask her who she got it from [*peratra tamin'ia?*] and she will most likely give an arch reply. She in turn demands that her 'boyfriend' [*sipa*] wear an article of her clothing to demonstrate his commitment to her. It is therefore not uncommon to see boys wearing women's wraps [*salova*] and even lipstick and jewellery at circumcision parties where they are meeting their 'girlfriends'.

2. "Women are never fully incorporated into their husband's family or descent group unless by endogamy they belong already. Otherwise, they remain more closely tied to their own kin group than to their husband and his" [Southall 1986:420 with reference to general Malagasy custom].

3. If a woman has lived with her husband for many years and has grown-up children by him she becomes a valued member of the community she has moved into. Even if the husband dies or leaves her she may well stay put in her adopted village. It is the presence of her children that makes this appropriate, as is made clear by the fact that when she dies her body will still be taken back to her father's Household. If the children are old enough when there is a separation in theory the man should take them (especially the sons). However he may only do so if he pays sufficient compensation, likened to wages [*karama*], for the effort involved in the raising of the children. As many men are unable or unwilling to come up with satisfactory compensation (at least one cow) women often retain de facto custody of their children. Even a powerful senior *panjaka* we knew (*Tsaninena*) was having trouble persuading his teenage son by an ex-wife (now dead) to move back in with him.

4. Although Fathers lose some control over the children of their daughters who marry out, they are still very actively thought of as his descendants [*taranaka*]. Thus despite the heavy patrilineal bias there is still definitely a cognatic view of relatedness. This is demonstrated by the fact that all grandchildren, whether they be through sons or daughters, should attend celebrations/rituals held by their 'grandfather' [*iababe*].

5. [F]: *Finaritra?* [S1]: *Ie.* [F]: *Akory anareo masa, etoa avao, anontany abo koa, da akory aby koa eny izay?* [S1]: *Ahay da soa avao, da tsisy maresaka, da anareo aty abo koa?* [F]: *A da tsy manahy, mbola mangi, da anareo abo koa?* [S2]: *Da anay aby izay masa, da akory aby anareo iny?* [F]: *Da izy aby izay.* [O]: *Da anay aby izay.* [S]: *Da izy aby izay.*

6. There are some uxori-local marriages but these are extremely rare and undesirable from the man's point of view. If a man moves to his wife's village he is thought of as a non-achiever [*tsy maharonga tena*] and is treated as a serf by his father-in-law [*rafoza*].

7. Instead of referring to patrilineal descent it might be more appropriate to imagine growth in terms of the "cumulative process of patrification" [Southall 1986:422] since household growth is as important as the creation of corporate lineages.

8. The equivalent to a '*kombohitra*' for the pastoral *Bara* herders is a temporary cattle camp known in the local dialect as a '*kombohitsy*' [cf Elli 1993:34].

9. In real life, as opposed to an imaginary world, Fathers try to lay claim to as many descendants as possible. Although patrilocal residence is preferred, who is and who is not a descendant is judged by cognatic reckoning [cf Astuti 1995a: 80-89] independent of where someone may happen to live. Therefore the offspring of sons who homestead far off and the offspring of daughters who marry away (and all their respective descendants) are all counted as descendants of the original Father figure. In addition 'outsider' women marrying 'in' are adopted as daughters and become kin [*hava*]. They are known as 'our people' [*olo aminay*] by members of the patrilineal descent group. In a way they are substituting for the real daughters who have left, replacing them in the imaginary constitution of the body as imagined by *Iaban'i Zafitala*.

10. A contradiction between homesteading and the 'filling up of the body' of a village is apparent here: if everybody went out to homestead the 'body' would forever be being 'emptied'. However it is the insoluble nature of such contradictions that makes ideals (ignoring the contradictions) so appealing. As I have already noted it is equally idealistic to imagine all daughters staying in the village; this, though, does not prevent people from fantasizing about such a scenario. It should also be pointed out that the contradiction between homesteading and 'filling up the body' is not as great as it seems. It is true that if all sons went out to homestead the ideal would be shattered; however, what is actually imagined is one Father's particular homestead and its development into a village. From the point of view of the 'imager' (the Father who heads the homestead) there is no contradiction here; he starts a homestead and simply desires that all his descendants will stay and build it up. The contradiction only arises because the sons have a different outlook to that of their Father; they too are eager to create something of their own rather than be a part of someone else's creation. Thus they also would like to break off and homestead. It is the conflicting priorities of Fathers and sons that makes the contradiction and that makes the ideal unrealistic. In a way then the ideal also serves to mask and deny the inevitable tension between Fathers and sons.

11. Tracing ancestries is made more problematic by taboos on naming dead ancestors. Names of ancestors are treasured and should remain hidden so that enemies outside the clan cannot use their names to utter excessively strong and personal curses [*opa*], which would inevitably provoke unwanted violence.

12. The Malagasy word '*piambina*' which I have translated as Minder is derived from the verb '*miambina*' which means to look after. The verb can be used with reference to anything that needs taking care of but is most commonly used when referring to houses, children or cows. An alternative translation would be 'guardian' [cf Feeley-Harnik 1982:37].

13. Although the roles of Eye of the Water and Wife of Misfortune are completely separate, both positions may be combined and held by one person.

14. Sorcery through poisoning seems to be tied up with the idea of hospitality: who can you trust to give you food; are others too suspicious to accept food from you? Giving hospitality is in a sense a challenge; accepting hospitality generates trust and kinship.

15. The idea of the 'people's choice' is confusing here. Although it is explicitly stated that all the people [*vahoaka*] choose the '*kobatany*' it emerged on further questioning that it was a council made up of the Minders of the One House of the Belly that made the final decision. Although this seems to go against the idea that the '*kobatany*' is elected by the people this is not really the case as Minders of the One House are seen as the natural and legitimate spokesmen for their subjects. If they operate autocratically and not in broad accordance with the wishes of their subjects they will themselves be removed from office.

16. The idea of being able to choose anyone is also slightly misleading. Although the choice is, in principle, 'open' the vast majority of '*kobatany*' are already Minders of the One House when they are selected. This is not really surprising because someone who is already a Minder of the One House already has a proven track-record as an effective ruler unlike an ordinary citizen; however it does underline how ideology and practice are not identical. Despite protestations of 'open' choice two extra provisos must also be made here: i) sons of incumbent '*kobatany*' cannot inherit their father's position ; ii) some lineages in some clans are actively ruled out because their forebears proved to be ineffective or unjust leaders [see Chapter 3 for more detail on these points].

Chapter 3

The responsibilities and ‘selection’ of the leaders

Competing idioms of power in *Sahafatra*

What is surprising about the term *panjaka* is its inclusivity. From the descriptions of the roles of Fathers, Minders of the One House and Earth-Shakers it should be clearly apparent that they are radically different types of people; and yet they are all classified as *panjaka*¹. I shall use this interesting paradox as a key to explaining and understanding the nature of ruling in *Sahafatra*. By unpacking the contradictions contained within the concept of *panjaka* I intend to demonstrate that there is an inherent tension in the *panjaka* system itself, stemming from the difference between what it is to be a Father and what it is to be an Earth-Shaker. I will argue that these two positions are based on different sources of authority which are articulated in contrasting ways. I contend that Minders of the One House, with one foot in both camps, are the men caught in the middle; they unwittingly mediate between the two competing systems of thought.

Fathers, Minders of the One House and Earth-Shakers are all types of *panjaka* and are referred to as such in many different settings. However that does not mean that people have any difficulty distinguishing between them in practice. The basic distinction is one of seniority (the more senior they are the more exceptional they are thought to be): Fathers are thought of as ordinary or everyday *panjaka* [*panjaka tsotra*] and are an unremarkable phenomenon; Minders of the One House are the prototypical *panjaka* (if one refers to someone as a *panjaka* without qualifying the term it will be assumed that one is talking about this kind of man); Earth-Shakers are out-of-the-ordinary, extraordinary *panjaka* and if they need to be accurately identified or singled out they are called Great *Panjaka* [*panjaka-be*]. What we have is a system where the status of individuals is crystal clear (there is no problem differentiating between actual types of *panjaka*) but where the concept of *panjaka*-hood is blurred and confused. It is the blurred picture, constructed from what it is to be a Father, a Minder of the One House or an Earth-Shaker, that illuminates what

it is to be a ruler and what the nature of ruling is. I intend to explore these ideas by discussing the different realms of authority of the different types of *panjaka*. I shall show that there is a connection between the responsibilities a leader has and the way he is selected.

Realms of authority: how Fathers generate a domain to rule over

A Father is master of his own little house and the household it contains. He is described as the '*panjaka* of his wife and children' [*panjakan' vadiny sy zanany*] or as a plain, 'everyday *panjaka*' [*panjaka tsotra*]. The straightforward Father is in a position of 'natural' (although this is only one example of what is seen as 'natural') ascendance. By 'natural' I mean taken for granted to such an extent that his wife and descendants would never consider challenging his authority. His authority is a given. By virtue of building a separate house, of marrying and having children, he gains his position and cannot be replaced. This section will show how the Father generates all the subjects within his realm of authority. His responsibilities extend only as far as the boundaries of that which he has created, namely his descendants [*taranaka*]. Consequently there is no selection procedure; once he has 'created' descendants he automatically gains his place at their head.

One becomes a Father by marrying and having children. This involves building your own house, moving away from your own Father and breaking away from his authority. Becoming a Father is regarded as part of the natural development cycle for men. Although it is impossible to become entirely independent until one's own Father has died young men are gradually growing into the role as they take on more and more of the responsibilities once dominated and controlled by their own Father. It is every man's right to become a Father and it is expected that all men will become Fathers. Becoming a Father is a non-reversible process. Once a Father always a Father; the status cannot be taken away. One remains a Father until death by dint of the fact that there are descendants [*taranaka*] beneath you. They are masters [*tompo*] of their own creation.

The practice of teknonymy illustrates this well. A man is given a name when he is born² and is called and referred to by this name until he himself has a child. When this first child is born the

man not only literally becomes a biological father, he also becomes a public, social father and is addressed as such; his name is changed with reference to his changed status. He therefore becomes known as 'Father of ...' [*iaban'i ...*] whatever the name of his child is ³. This new name is the one by which he will now universally be known. A critical distinction is being made here between those who are descendants of others and those who have descendants themselves ⁴. The practice of teknonymy identifies the parents with their children and socially validates their existence. The fact that the father carries the name of his child forever demonstrates the inseparability of the two and the inalienability of the relationship ⁵.

Fathers are men who have taken their destiny into their own hands. This is why Fathers are regarded as self-made men who have achieved their own status. A Father is described as someone who rules over his wife and children [*panjakan' vadiny sy zanany*]. He is regarded as someone who has 'stolen' a wife [*nangala-bady*] and in union with her generated descendants to rule over. His power rests on the fact that he has, with his wife, created his own people and his own domain to rule over. The Father is senior to his wife and female kin; the Father is senior to his son; the elder son is senior to his younger brother. In a normal family setting the authority of the Father is unquestionable; the Father rules [*mandidy ny iaba*] and this is accepted as a non-negotiable law.

The Father's authority is based on the principle of descent (privileging connections through the male line) and relies on the successful production of descendants so that this idiom can be fully lived and played out. The descent ideology is expressed less in terms of essence than in terms of the proper relation of people to each other, which I call 'alignment'. The proper ordering (or 'alignment') of people creates and represents an 'essential' connection ⁶. The Father is thus very concerned about: the spatial arrangement within the house; the proper form of greetings; the correct order when walking Indian file; having the final word in an argument; the appropriate division of labour; the respectful use of terms of address and kinship terms; the carrying out of ritual duties towards seniors; his ability to access blessing from the ancestors; control over his sons to build up a strong descent group; the creation and maintenance of communal tombs symbolising descent; the idea of inherited power as part of the natural order of things.

Such concerns are characteristic of Fathers who are figures intensely pre-occupied with the combined issues of descent and 'alignment'. One of the bases of being a *panjaka* is thought to be Father-hood because Fathers set up, and are masters of, the individual Households that form the building blocks of the wider society. In constructing Households Fathers utilise the idiom of descent by literally generating descendants to rule over and by governing how they behave. Consequently descent becomes a universal idiom for life. The portability, adaptability and endless repeatability of the descent idiom, and the fact that it must be played out for life to continue, make it an enduring theme.

Duties and responsibilities of the Father

The duties and responsibilities of a Father reflect his role as head of a group of descendants. The extent of power of the Father is over all that has stemmed from him, over all his children, male and female, over all his grandchildren and so on down the generations. As far as pragmatic activities are concerned a Father is a director of affairs and representative of his descendants. He will sit in his house receiving visitors and deciding on appropriate courses of action to follow. His house is a focus of activity for all his descendants. At an everyday level he will tell his children what work needs to be done; errands to be run, messages to be taken, goods to be bought at market and most importantly the agricultural tasks for the day. Even when a Father's sons have started to set up their own houses, agricultural work is still held in common. Agriculture is still a matter for the extended family and relies on cooperation; consequently people who get on well are said to 'trample each others rice-fields' [*mifanosy*] in preparation for planting.

A Father is responsible for the well-being and proper treatment of his wife and children: he must provide a house and shelter for his family; he must provide access to the blessing of the family ancestors; he must organise the agricultural production of the family ensuring that there is enough food for all, all year round; he must care for his wife through pregnancy, birth and her vulnerable period after the birth; he must dispose of the umbilical cords of his children in the appropriate place; he must organise and sponsor the circumcisions of his male children; he must negotiate and broker the marriages of his children (for daughters ensuring that they will receive

the proper treatment and respect and dues from the husband; for sons aiding in the bid to make the woman agree to marry and helping out with costs involved); he must resolve any disputes arising within the family; he must represent the family at any public events (at funerals, debates, councils, circumcisions, the raising up of new leaders [*panjaka*] etc); he must host any family events; and he must play an active role in whatever Big-House he is attached to.

If we consider how men become Fathers it becomes obvious that it is nonsensical to talk of a Father being 'chosen' [*fidina*]; no-one in the land of *Sahafatra* would ever dream of using the word in this context. A Father's position rests on the generation of a personal descent group; this is why a Father's position is not inherited. Each man must start anew as his authority is founded on the idea of being able to look downwards at his descendants. His permanent position comes by right of being a genitor and a social father. Descendants cannot be inherited but must be created. Thus becoming a Father relies not on an act of choice or on simple ascription, but rather on a specific process of creation

Minders of the One House

The Minder of the One House has responsibilities both in terms of the practical day-to-day functioning of the Big-House and certain ritual duties. Like a Father, the Minder of the One House conducts all his business from home. There is no division between his domestic space and his 'office' space. The Minder of the One House effectively holds court in his one room Big-House. Any members of the Big-House who have a problem, a query or a request come to him there. The Minder of the One House must maintain the unity and cohesion of his Big-House. He must oversee the growth and success of the Big-House by contributing in a practical and ritual way. As we shall see the force of his pragmatic interventions depends on his ritual pre-eminence. He is artificially 'raised up' above the people, by the people, in order for him to attain the power necessary to lead effectively.

One of the most important ways a Minder of the One House can contribute to create Big-House community is to control, manage and mediate disputes. He is responsible for sorting out

problems and complaints within the Big-House. The most common problems that have to be dealt with are: theft; damage to crops; land disputes; accusations of incest; failure to contribute to communal collections of money or rice; the apportioning of blame after a fight; accusations of witchcraft etc

The Minder of the One House is a mixture of an arbiter and a ruler. When people have problems they come to the Big-House and the Minder of the One House hears them out. He will not necessarily pronounce judgement on the matter; rather, he is likely to ask for more details and to call others to give their side of the story before suggesting a certain course of action. For a particularly contentious issue he might decide to call for a public debate [*kabaro*] to be held so that everyone may have their say. It is very rare for a Minder of the One House to dictate affairs. Instead he uses his authority indirectly to bring about a resolution to a dispute. Only when consensus cannot be reached and when his patience has run out will he exercise his right to have the final say in the matter [*mahatapaka*].

Providing a communal space and acting as a representative

One of the responsibilities of the Minder of the One House is to provide a communal space for his subjects. The Big-House is the home of the Minder of the One House but he must also allow it to be used for other purposes. The Big-House will be used by members to: have public debates; hold circumcisions; hold marriages; lay out the bodies of newly dead commoners; perform the Black Wine ceremony [see Chapter 4]; act out the 'raising up' of the Minder of the One House [see Chapter 4]. The Minder of the One House presides over the first four activities and is involved in the final two. Although the Big-House is his house it is also a house that belongs to all the people and he must willingly give it over to them at short notice.

The Minder of the One House acts as a representative for all the members of his Big-House. He must go to several types of public event on their behalf: the 'raising up' of other clan leaders; the Black Wine Ceremony of leaders from the same Family of Big-Houses within the clan; the funerals of clan members; councils of his own clan leaders. As representative of the Big-House

he must act as a channel for blessing from the clan ancestors. He asks for blessing from the ancestors of the Big-House at circumcisions and marriages. He is not the one to ask for blessing when he himself is 'raised up'.

The reason for choice: how Minders are 'chosen'

From the description of duties it should be clear that the Minder of the One House has obligations to all the members of the Big-House whether or not they are his real descendants. His duties are considered so important that inheritance cannot be relied upon to provide the right person every time; both ability and political expediency must be taken into account. This is why he is said to be, and in some ways is, 'chosen' [*fidina*]. A Minder of the One House is 'chosen' according to certain rules, precedents and criteria. Not every man becomes a Minder of the One House although all adult males within the Big-House are theoretically eligible. In this way a Minder of the One House is different to a Father who gains his position automatically as soon as he has a child, without reference to anybody else. There are five main ways in which one may be chosen as a Minder of the One House:

1. The office-holder may offer you the position while he still lives. If the subjects do not strongly oppose this move the position is simply transferred from one person to another whom he has selected.
2. The office-holder may die suddenly and unexpectedly. A council of senior subjects will choose another leader who must be a close relative of the deceased in order to remove any suspicion of foul-play.
3. The subjects may be dissatisfied with the Minder of the One House and by popular agreement will remove him and replace him with another.
4. A new Big-House may be created by fissioning from an existing Big-House.

A new Minder of the One House is chosen by the members of the branch that is splitting off.

5. A Father may build up a large enough power-base of descendants to declare his own house as a de facto Big-House.

It is clear then that, normally, becoming a Minder of the One House involves being 'chosen' by someone already in authority or by a group of people representing the Big-House in the absence of an accepted leader. Only in one instance, the final one involving the inauguration of a completely new Big-House, is the act of becoming a Minder of the One House an act of self-determination and self-creation. Even in that case the success of the venture depends on the other Big-Houses choosing to accept the changed state of affairs by recognising the new leader. So it could be said that the process of becoming a Minder of the One House is initiated by an act of choice. This element of choice is, however, generally governed by the application of standard criteria.

Criteria for choice and justification of the need to choose

The choice of a Minder of the One House is based on a combination of descent considerations and judgements of ability and aptitude. The most obvious choice for the position is always the most senior relative (in male descent terms) of the incumbent. Most often the successor to the position is a younger brother or a son of the ex-Minder of the One House. Nevertheless this is not an automatic process but rather an act of deliberation involving an active decision as to the suitability of a candidate. However appropriate the candidate is thought to be in terms of descent closeness to the predecessor, if he is too young, too old, too weak, too poor, too irresponsible, or too untrustworthy he will be passed over in favour of a more distant alternative relative [cf Leach 1954:213-214 for similar practice among the Shan]. Political expediency is also an important factor. The very fact that the selection is felt of as an act of choice influences the decision. The power of the Minder of the One House rests on his subjects so any leader who

does not have the full support of his subjects is weak. This is why a consensus decision is so important.

As we have seen a Big-House may be segmented into two or three different families. Therefore in order to maintain popular support for a leader there must be a certain amount of power-sharing between the families. Since there can only be one leader at any one time this is achieved by an informal system of taking turns. It is not unusual therefore for an incumbent Minder of the One House to 'offer' [*manolotra*] his position to an appropriate person from another family. The necessity of maintaining trust and co-operation within the Big-House also accounts for the custom of keeping the office of Minder of the One House 'in the family' in cases where the predecessor has died a sudden and unexpected death. The fact that the position cannot move to another 'family' in these cases removes the motivation for, and prevents suspicion of, murder. This direct inheritance of power within the family is known as 'sweeping up the ashes of the father' [*mamafa ny lakevo ny iabany*], which metaphorically conveys the idea of completing his responsibilities [*mamita ny adidy*]. Only a descendant of the same 'grandfather' [*raibe*] can perform this duty; an outsider does not have the right [*olo-kafa tsy azo mamafa ny lakevo ny iaba*].

The Minder of the One House has authority over all the members of his Big-House, whether they are his descendants or not. Minders of the One House have not generated all the people under their authority. This is why they must be 'chosen' [*fidina*] as representative heads. They are subject to the will of the people because they head something which is not entirely of their own making and of which they are not 'naturally' master. They are temporary incumbents; they do not hold their position by right. As head of a Big-House a Minder of the One House is representing a cluster of extended Families. Thus he rules over equals and contemporaries as well as over juniors.

This is not like the Father who rules over people who are without doubt classed as his juniors, coming from descending generations. A Father just is senior to his dependents whereas a Minder of the One House is not. This is why a Minder of the One House must be 'raised up' in a special ceremony (to be discussed later) to differentiate him from his peers. As we will see the fact that

he is 'raised up' by his subjects demonstrates his reliance on them. However the ceremony also takes the form of a test to prove that the candidate is worthy of being placed in a senior position to his fellows.

Earth-Shakers and their sphere of authority

The Earth-Shaker operates out of his own Big-House which is identical to the Big-House of a Minder of the One House. However the Big-House of the Earth-Shaker subsumes all the other Big-Houses of the clan Belly [*troky*] and can be said to represent all of them. The Big-House of the Earth-Shaker is like a parent encompassing its offspring. The similarity of the procedures for approaching a Father, for approaching a Minder of the One House and for approaching an Earth-Shaker, all of which involve being respectful, being submissive and paying tribute in the form of a gift, reinforces the idea that the Minder of the One House and the Earth-Shaker are just more senior versions of a Father encompassing more people; and that the Big-House and the Big-House of the Earth-Shaker are just larger versions of an ordinary Household. The people themselves view Minders of the One House and Earth-Shakers as types of Fathers, explicitly calling them 'Fathers of the People' [*iaban'olo aby*]. However, we should not accept this equation at face value ourselves. To give the impression that Fathers, Minders of the One House and Earth-Shakers are different types of the same thing is misleading: as we have seen a Minder of the One House is not literally a Father, and the Big-House is structured differently to an everyday Household. In some senses Fathers and Earth-Shakers are qualitatively different.

The sphere of authority of the Earth-Shaker is even greater than that of the Minder of the One House. An Earth-Shaker is an extreme form of a Minder of the One House. He rules not just over a set of extended Families but also over a Family of Big Houses. His elevated position is even further removed from the realm of his 'natural' authority as a Father. As one moves up the hierarchy of authority from Father to Minder of the One House to Earth-Shaker one moves further away from what is seen as the 'natural' (ie unquestioned and unquestionable) basis of authority: pure descent. The vast majority of an Earth-Shakers subjects are not descended from him. Neither is the lineage he comes from necessarily senior to that of his subjects. His

unjustified super-elevation means that he has even further to be 'raised up'. This means that he is even more subject to the will of the people than the Minder of the One House. The form his 'raising up' ceremony takes is thus designed to test his worthiness even more sternly. Not only is the Earth-Shaker further from what is seen as the 'natural' source of authority than the Minder of the One House, his sphere of authority is also far more extensive and his responsibilities significantly more far-reaching.

Earth-Shakers have many of the same responsibilities as Minders of the One House but they operate at a higher level. They govern not just a single Big-House but a whole Family of Big-Houses. They are responsible for the welfare and security of all the members of the Family of Big-Houses. This responsibility does not usually involve dealing with individual's problems as they can be sorted out by the Minder of the One House. Rather it is when there is a problem between two Big-Houses (within the Family of Big-Houses), or between two Families of Big-Houses, that the Earth-Shaker will act as the mediator. The Earth-Shaker is also someone who can be appealed to if an individual feels hard done by a ruling at a lower level. This is however a risky procedure as to re-open a matter that has already been judged is considered difficult. Only if there are strong reasons to object to the initial judgement is such a course of action condoned; otherwise the appeal is likely to be even more harshly treated for wasting the Earth-Shakers time and for not respecting the original ruling.

Jurisdiction over, and association with, the land

Although an Earth-Shaker might be asked to deal with a variety of complaints his major responsibility and the one that people continually emphasise is his right to rule over land issues. Land issues are considered so important that even minor disputes must be brought before the relevant Earth-Shaker. The Earth-Shaker will be informed of the problem and he will call for all the subjects be notified so that they can assemble for a debate [*kabaro*] to resolve the issue. If a consensus decision cannot then be reached the Earth-Shaker will intervene and end the debate with his own final ruling. This is why he is said to 'rule the land' [*mandidy tany*].

I have described the Earth-Shaker as someone responsible for a certain set of people. Although this is true in a technical sense it is not the way the people themselves seem to perceive the situation. For the people the Earth-Shaker is not someone who rules over such and such a group, he is simply someone who, as they say, 'carries the land' [*minday tany*]. It is interesting that control over the land is the one inalienable right of the Earth-Shaker. Many of the Earth-Shakers peripheral powers have been taken away, delegated or devolved but their control of the land has never come into question. The emergence and rise of the *Dina* is attributed to the failure of the traditional system of authority to control banditry. The consequence was the movement of many powers from the Earth-Shakers to the *Dina*. However the one right that could not be transferred and that has never fallen into the realm of authority of the *Dina* is the right to 'rule the land'.

Public roles and receiving strangers

The Earth-Shaker is almost always a Minder of the One House (the two roles can be held simultaneously) and consequently he shares all the same duties as the Minder of the One House concerning: dispute settlement; providing a communal space; acting as a representative. However, because of the high profile and elevated position of the Earth-Shaker it is even more stressed that he must be present at the aforementioned public events.

The Earth-Shaker acts as a representative for his Family of Big-Houses and for the clan. If there is a need for inter-clan dealings they will happen at the level of the Earth-Shaker. For example the Earth-Shakers of different clans may, in exceptional circumstances, meet to decide how to counter some external threat. This is said to have been the case in the distant past when the clans united to defeat a highland *Merina* army in the 19th century. It also happened more recently when the Earth-Shakers united to decree that a *Dina* should be formed to counter banditry.

It is also traditional for the Earth-Shakers of all the clans in the administrative district of *Vondrozo* to assemble when a new 'President de la Delegation Speciale' (the most senior government administrative post in the region) is elected. They act as the guard of honour for the 'President' in what the public see as his 'raising up'. The public involvement of the Earth-

Shakers implicates them in official Malagasy Government but it also casts official 'Government' [*fanjaka*] ⁷ in traditional terms.

It is also the duty of the most senior leader present (the Earth-Shaker or if there is not one in the village the Minder of the One House) to receive strangers. It is impossible to enter a village without being drawn into formal sit-down introductions and explanations with the most important people available. When you have been received once there is no problem returning at any time in the future; you should simply head directly to the house you first visited so as not to snub your original host. In this way you become committed to visiting certain people; the tie is fastened each time you come. If there is no Earth-Shaker present many villages are effectively closed. It's like a bad horror movie with people peeping out of cracks of doors and shutting them in your face as you approach. Children may run away screaming and even leaders themselves may try and slip away into the bushes to avoid their responsibilities. It is part of an Earth-Shaker's job to receive 'strangers' [*vahiny*]; if he is not there people may be too frightened; they are unwilling to shoulder the responsibility of inviting a guest in. Even when there are a couple of men around and women inside houses invitations to 'come in' [*mandrosoa*] are not necessarily forthcoming. Often in the middle of the day the only people left in the village are the old, especially the women. They have no obligation to entertain and give hospitality to strangers. Instead when you manage to corner one of them they unashamedly tell you that 'everyone is gone to the fields' [*ny olo aby an'tonda*] even when that contradicts the evidence of your own eyes. This is just code language indicating that there are not enough seniors around to host a reception committee. Many people are simply pottering around quietly minding their own business; if there is no leader they are certainly not going to concern themselves with yours; that would be a rash, dangerous thing to do. After waiting around for a bit you begin to feel unwelcome and leave.

At *Bemandresy* (clan *Antsoro*) there was a Minder of the One House present but he was suspicious and did not extend any sort of welcome; in fact when we told him we were going to bathe in the river below he decided to check on us, creating a pretext to spy on our movements. He pretended to come down to collect water in a bucket (never men's work) and after confirming our whereabouts slunk away into the bushes, retreating to the village to firmly shut his door in

case we returned. From ordinary people this sort of behaviour is acceptable and expected but for a Minder of the One House it is ridiculous. On recounting the story in other villages people would laugh and mock his timidity and incapacity to handle strangers. His actions were reprehensible because it shamed the village and made it vulnerable. By refusing to offer hospitality to a stranger he threw away the chance to discover the purpose of their journey and diffuse any potential danger. He also gave the village an impression of weakness that could be exploited by other foes.

The need for active selection: choosing an Earth-Shaker

It can be seen from the above description that the Earth-Shaker has a tremendous range of responsibilities. This fact combined with his distancing from the 'natural' descent-based realm of authority necessitates that he be very actively selected for the role. 'Choice' becomes the first priority. There are 3 main ways of being selected as an Earth-shaker:

1. The old Earth-shaker offers his position to you and a hand-over is completed while the ex-office-holder is still living. Such a hand over must have the tacit blessing of the members of the Family of Big-Houses who the Earth-shaker represents.

2. The incumbent is removed by the popular will of the people (members of the Family of Big-Houses) and is replaced with a candidate selected by a senior council and approved by them.

3. The old Earth-shaker dies suddenly and a successor is appointed by a senior council made up of representative members of the Family of Big-Houses and verified by the wide-spread support of the people.

The process of selection appears to be very similar to that for the Minders of the One House except for the fact that there is no fissioning off to create a new post and neither is there any auto-genesis. The number of Earth-shakers is permanently fixed. Although the process of selection appears similar the criteria influencing the choice of an Earth-Shaker, as opposed to a Minder of the One House, are very different. We have seen how Minders of the One House are chosen by flexible variations on the theme of descent; a pragmatic reworking of the idiom of descent utilised in order to pass-over inappropriate candidates.

Selection of an Earth-Shaker [cf Kent 1979:84-85 for description of election of leaders in 17th century *Antanosy* and non-hereditary nature of traditional chiefs there] is not a variation on the theme of descent, rather it is positively anti-descent. This is because when the position is offered on to someone else it is explicitly stated that it may not be handed on to the son of the incumbent [*tsy azo mandova toera ny zanany*]. The position of Earth-shaker is not permitted to be hereditary. The ideal candidate for the replacement of an Earth-shaker should be distant [*lavitra*] both in terms of descent relatedness and geography. This unformalised but strongly-felt notion that the position should rotate between families and between villages [*tsy maintsy mifindra toera*] prevents the creation and propagation of dynasties. No single Big-House is permitted to monopolise the powerful role of Earth-Shaker, a monopoly which would allow it to dominate the Family of Big-Houses over an extended period of time. The existence of this unofficial 'rule of rotation' probably explains why a system of 'rotating kingship' was said to operate in the area. Although 'rotating kingship' is too precise a term to accurately describe what is going on it does help convey the ideal that power should be shared between families and villages over the years, rather than being held in one place.

The extreme case of the Old Woman

The Old Woman has exactly the same responsibilities as the Earth-Shaker but also takes on a 'totemic' importance for the whole clan. This is because the Old Woman is the closest link to the line of Founding Ancestors and is the personification of the whole clan. Consequently people are obsessive about knowing the whereabouts and the state of health of the Old Woman,

and insist on his presence at every public occasion. If for any reason the Old Woman does not appear people become agitated and angry; they demand an explanation and if it is not deemed satisfactory the Old Woman is punished, in absentia, in the form of a fine.

At one funeral we witnessed the Old Woman of the *Masitafika*, *Iaban'i Berlet*, a modest, kind wizened old man, was unable to attend because he was suffering from coughing fits. A *panjaka* of the *Renifatsy* lineage angrily demanded to know why he was not there. "Where is the Old Woman?" he asked [*aia ranavavy*], "Where is my grandfather, where is the elder brother of the people?" [*aia iababeko, aia zokin'olo*]. A friend of ours called *Iaban'i Sambazafy* tried to explain his absence, defending him by saying he was ill. However he had no answer to the complaint that if he was 'indisposed' [*tsy mana fahefa*] he should have sent a messenger [*tokony naniraka*], as *Tsaninena*, another *panjaka* who was subsequently excused his non-presence, had done.

The Eye of the Water [*mason-drano*] of *Iaban'i Berlet* offered to carry the discussion back to him, but the crowd rounded on him furiously at the very suggestion. He was curtly reminded that an Eye of the Water cannot substitute for a *panjaka* let alone the Old Woman, and was told he would be punished if he uttered such heresy again. As far as the mass were concerned only the presence of *Iaban'i Berlet* would do. In the event, since it was clear that he was not going to arrive, a prolonged discussion ensued as to whether the Old Woman should be fined or not for his unexcused absence. It was eventually concluded that he would not be fined this time but would merely be administered with a very stern warning not to commit the same error again.

A return to descent in place of choice

The Old Woman is chosen in the sense that he is an Earth-Shaker, but once he has attained that position he is automatically recognised as the Old Woman due to his membership of the lineage stemming from the most senior Great Ancestor. In fact the range of choice for this senior Earth-shaker is severely reduced because this lineage is only allowed to have one Big-House. For the *Masitafika* clan this means that the Old Woman must come from the *Andrambaharoy* lineage,

and must live in the only Big-House of that lineage which is situated in the ancestral village of *Ambalarano*.

The most senior lineage is not allowed to divide up and separate off from itself but must rather stick together and adhere more closely to rules of hereditary descent. Thus it is possible for the son of the Old Woman to inherit the position [*mandova toera ny zanany*], an idea that would be impossible for the selection of an ordinary Earth-shaker. The idiom of descent is returned to so as not to lose the most valued link to the clan-founding ancestors of the past. The fact that this most senior representative of the clan, the one supposedly closest to the founding ancestors, is referred to as an 'old woman' [*ranavavy*], even though he is a man, is informative. It is as if the men are trying to harness and take credit for the reproductive power of women. However the claim is not to be a young woman but an old one. An old woman is someone who has been productive and generative but who is no longer so; she is symbolic of past, not present, fertility. By claiming to be an 'old woman' [*ranavavy*] the ruler is therefore casting himself as an Eve-like figure, a metaphorical root of fertility upon which the present-day fertility of the clan is based.

This interpretation of the 'old woman' as a static root is supported by the other uses and associations of the term '*ranavavy*' [old woman] and by the actual habits of, and regulations surrounding, the leader holding that title. A '*ranavavy*' is a woman regarded as so old that normal kinship terms are regarded as irrelevant and redundant when referring to her and are consequently ignored. For example, grand-daughters of a very elderly woman we knew and visited often in *Miarinarivo* (clan *Vohilakatra*) always referred to her as the 'old woman' [*ranavavy*] rather than as grand-mother [*endribe*]. The impersonal way in which she was addressed suggests that really old women are regarded as having reached a stage beyond kinship. Their individual kinship connections are downplayed so that they can become generic symbols of past fertility for everyone⁸. 'Old women' are also thought of as largely immobile, being referred to as people who always stay in and mind the village [*piandry tana*]. They can look at their past achievements with self-satisfaction; they exude a passive stillness because as past 'producers' they can wait for everything (which they have generated after all) to come to back to visit them [cf Middleton 1995:223-233 on the power of origin points in south Madagascar; also Errington 1989:128 on how in Eastern Indonesia the ritual lord known as 'Mother'

represents the sedentary, dignified, silent aspect of power].

Thus 'old women' combine a set of powerful associations in one body: permanence and stability, undeniable past fertility, and the general appeal of people who appear to be 'beyond kinship'. This combination makes the 'old woman' a potent and enduring figure and may explain why supreme clan leaders have appropriated the term. However this is not simple appropriation; clan leaders really do behave like, and really are treated like, prototypical 'old women'. They must live in pre-ordained ancestral villages and are not allowed to move; they stay put in these royal villages and expect people to come to them; they (unlike other types of senior *panjaka*) are not easily removed or replaced; and they (unlike other types of *panjaka*) are respected for their life-giving connection to the past, even if they are weak and feeble now. As ultimate clan-leaders and 'old women' they are valuable 'roots' [*fototra*] upon which future fertility is founded; therefore they should not be, and are not, casually disposed of.

The changing nature of power as one ascends the hierarchy

A Father is not chosen as a Father, he creates himself through his own actions and justifies his position by merit of the fact that he heads his own descent group. A Minder of the One House is selected mainly according to descent criteria but also with an eye on his capability and suitability and taking into consideration an equitable distribution of power within the Big-House. A Minder of the One House can create himself but this is a rare event and one that must be sanctioned by the other leaders. Earth-shakers are chosen and must be chosen according to criteria outside of descent; however suitable they are sons are not allowed to inherit their father's position. On no occasion may an Earth-shaker create himself. The Old Woman is chosen from a more limited pool of candidates because he comes from the exclusive and indivisible senior lineage. As one ascends the hierarchy ladder the element of choice becomes more stressed and insisted upon until one reaches the peak of the authority system where choice is once again taken away.

This distancing (from 'natural' authority) as one ascends the hierarchy means that the more

senior the leader the less foundation there is for his authority. However as one moves up the hierarchy a different source of power/authority can be seen to emerge counteracting the imbalance. The terminology used for the leaders gives us a clue to the changing nature of power/authority as one ascends the hierarchy. A Father's authority is based on the fertility and growth of his family; a Minder of the One House's authority relies on the maintenance and general health of the Big-House; an Earth-Shaker's authority stems from his ability, in conjunction with his subjects, to 'make the land fertile' [*mahamasy ny tany*]. The idiom of power and the justification for that power changes from **family** to **house** to **land** as one goes up the authority structure. There is a transition from a concentration on descent to a concentration on the overall fertility of the land.

.....

Endnotes

1. It is clear to see the heavy cultural emphasis placed on the idea of *panjaka*. It is assumed that all countries and peoples have *panjaka*, not *panjaka* of the same type as *Sahafatra* necessarily, but *panjaka* nonetheless. The existence of other competing types of *panjaka* makes it a contentious term. *Panjaka*-hood is the dominant idiom and the only idiom people understand for authority. Therefore the category of *panjaka* is one that cannot be ignored by those parties keen to win over the hearts and the minds of the people. The Church (which presents God as a kind of *panjaka*) is involved in a struggle to define what the term *panjaka* should represent. The way the Church presents itself and how it is perceived helps illuminate and put into context what it is to be a traditional *panjaka*. It also begs the question of who/what is seen as the legitimate source of authority: God, the Government [*fanjaka*] or the Traditional Chiefs? It was interesting to note that the Malagasy Preacher at the Lutheran Church in *Vondrozo* was forced to use the idiom of *panjaka*-hood to try to win people over to religion. Even in the Nativity play held in *Vondrozo* the dominant idiom was that of *panjaka*. God was presented as the Biggest *Panjaka* of them All [*panjaka lehibe indrindra*] and Jesus was introduced as the New *Panjaka* [*panjaka vaovao*]. Herod was depicted as a vicious Traditional *Panjaka* (wearing the identifying French-style trench-coat, a local symbol of power and dominance), addicted to exercising his despotic power every hour of every day [*isan'andro, isan'ora*]. The vicious presentation of Herod as a *panjaka* was a very lightly veiled criticism of traditional ways. The Pastor made another indirect attack by talking about how foreigners [*vazaha*] have a *panjaka* between people and God and how this is evil and wrong. In the view he propounded *panjaka* as people know them should be done away with as there is only one true *panjaka* and that is God. The irony of the whole discourse was that as well as borrowing the idiom of *panjaka*-hood the Pastor behaved like a traditional *panjaka* himself; the belligerent and angry delivery he adopted is associated with traditional *panjaka* forced to intervene and bring a debate to an end.

2. Names given to children are very arbitrary and are regarded as quite unimportant and insignificant. The name chosen will often be something exotic (eg a French Christian name) that the parents have heard and which has taken their fancy; it may even have been chosen by the doctor who assisted in the birth at the hospital, who is often the only person present who can read and write and is therefore able to fill out the birth certificate. People's personal names [*anaram-bata*] are not widely known outside their close family. All that is needed to get by is to know how people are related to you so that you can politely address them with the proper honorific term. The fact that *Iaban'i Zafitala*, for example, did not know the personal names of any of his wife's relatives never caused him any problems.

3. The same is true for women whose names remain constant, even when they are married, until the birth of their first child. At this juncture they become known as 'Mother of ...' [*endrin'i ...*] whatever the name of the child is.

4. The distinction is clearer conceptually than in practice. This is because those who have not yet had, or who cannot have children, are also sometimes given teknonymical names: a young man may be known as 'father' of one of his elder brother's children, and a childless woman may be known as 'mother' of one of her sisters offspring.

5. This principle of the inseparability of the producer and its product extends into the realm of nature: bees and honey are both known by the same term [*tantely*], as are mango trees and mangoes [*manga*]. The inseparability of father and child is also emphasized by their sharing of food: although the father will eat from a separate plate to his young children he will give (and they will learn to ask for) some of his own food to them during the course of the meal. Father and sons share sustenance and therefore substance in an act of commensality.

6. The father is particularly concerned about forging his own 'essential' connection because procreation beliefs do not attribute him such a major link. Conception stems from a single act of intercourse between a man and a woman. The semen [*tembo*] of the man makes the woman's blood sleep [*mampandry ra*]. Although this one act is sufficient it is desirable that the couple continue having sex during pregnancy to keep the vagina open and to repeatedly add doses of life-assisting semen. The couple should also be faithful and united at this time: if a woman sleeps with another man there is an idea that the father's essence will be to an extent contaminated and

diluted, weakening the baby; if the man sleeps with another woman the woman's birth-passage will clamp shut until the transgression is confessed and atoned for. The mechanics of procreation beliefs do not explain how the child is formed. Sex and procreation are considered to go together but the development of the baby is a separate matter. The coming together of the blood and semen creates a new life and a new destiny but the shape it will take is still undetermined. The blood of the mother and the semen of the father carry no imprint that will automatically be transferred to the baby; neither does the sexual act physically mould the child. Thus the child will not necessarily look like either the father or the mother. What influences the shape of the child is far more ethereal than the idea of transmitted substance would allow for. A child is more likely to look like its mother than its father but this is not because the mother physically 'presses' the child like a vinyl record but because her affective state may be mapped onto the child's features. There is no idea of biological inheritance here but rather a transference of indirect associations. Between mother and child the distinction between physical and emotional and between one and another is blurred. The close proximity, the attachment, the containment of one within the other during pregnancy means that there is far greater degree of interchange and interaction between mother and baby than between father and baby. Mother and baby are so involved and confused that what is a fleeting thought for the mother can become a permanent physical feature for the child. Thus the straight and silky hair of a child is accounted for by the fact that the mother was thinking about the Chinese shopkeeper she used to play with when she was small during her pregnancy. There is no strict logic here; the fact that a baby turns out to resemble an old friend and play-mate of the mother is not inevitable but is rather a play of chance, emotion and memory. The father lies outside this sphere of symbiotic relations. His contribution was to produce a destiny the nature of which is beyond his immediate control. His donation of semen created a life which is initially beyond his ken. However his semen is like a dormant and shapeless link staking a future claim in the child. The father will eventually use this passive bond to appeal to the child in an attempt to activate a social relationship between it and his own descent group. In the meantime he must remain a passive bystander himself.

7. The most important derivative of 'zaka', apart from *panjaka* is '*fanjaka*'. Broadly speaking '*fanjaka*' is any sort of large scale government institution. It is usually associated with official bureaucracy and the political structure of the nation-state. It is thought of for the most part as alien, unresponsive and run by outsiders; indeed sometimes the word for foreigner [*vazaha*] is used instead of '*fanjaka*'. '*Fanjaka*' is an obstacle to be negotiated, a resource to be manipulated and a final recourse to appeal to. Although people like to feel that the traditional system of authority is independent of the modern government this is to some extent an illusory division; now they are in effect often two poles of the same scale. There is a fusion of *panjaka* and '*fanjaka*', a combination of traditional custom [*fomba*] and the government way. For example local boundaries are interpreted as both ancestral territories and administrative units. The Earth-Shaker of the *Tevongo*, the most senior Earth-Shaker of them all, is an unofficial President *Sahafatra* (this is one of the titles by which he is known). He sees himself as a figurehead for all the peoples of the whole administrative district [*fivondronana*] of *Vondrozo*. Not surprisingly when *Karianga*, the territory making up the northern third of the district, split off to join the *Fivondronana* of *Manakara* (a major port on the coast), he was very upset and sad about the loss. At a stroke the land falling under his ritual mantle of authority was technically reduced; the *Sahafatra* elders [*raiamandreny*] were said to be artificially divided. People interpreted the separation as a plot masterminded by self-seeking politicians and carried out behind the backs of the general populace. Everyone was convinced that the northern territories were already homesick and wanted to rejoin the union [*te-hipody hitambatra*], or come home so to speak. It is clear that over time the traditional and government authorities mutually implicate one another. Nevertheless people keep them separate in their mind and think of them as categorically different. This is true to such an extent that it is still frowned upon to go to the '*fanjaka*' instead of the local descent group to sort out disputes.

8. The same is true for the term '*rangahy*', meaning old man, which is also applied to senior *panjaka*. A '*rangahy*' is an old man who has produced many children and who has also, in a sense, moved beyond kinship. The term '*rangahy*' is not just used to refer to old men, it may also be used to refer to anything that is past its productive best but which is still regarded with fondness. For example, an old date-palm no longer producing much fruit, but still towering proudly in the centre of a village, might be called a '*rangahy*' while being patted affectionately as if it were a real person. The term '*rangahy*' conveys permanence and enduring fertility; the '*rangahy*' himself is no longer fertile but he has produced much of that which still is fertile today.

Chapter 4

Testing: the process of becoming a senior *panjaka*

The previous chapter demonstrated that the more senior a *panjaka*, the greater the need for him to be ‘chosen’ and ‘tested’ by his subjects. The text essentially argued that senior *panjaka* have to be ‘chosen’ so that the best possible candidate for the job (according to a diverse set of criteria) may be put in place, and that they have to be ‘tested’ in order that they may prove themselves worthy of such an elevated position.

In this chapter I intend to elaborate on how they are ‘tested’ and how this ‘testing’ is interpreted both by the *panjaka* themselves and by their subjects. I will show that the ‘tests’ set for the *panjaka* are intentionally designed to be difficult so that the process of becoming a *panjaka* may universally be judged as significant. The tests set are not arbitrary but have a definite structure and sequence. This makes becoming a *panjaka* a lengthy, but officially recognised, process. The ritual tests specifically address the capabilities of the *panjaka*, however, it is important to note that there are, as we shall see, beneficial spin-offs for the subjects. The tests serve to try the endurance of and to humble the *panjaka*, but they also serve to appropriate his wealth at the same time.

Although this mercenary motivation for testing the *panjaka* is genuine and readily admitted to we should not let it obscure the more general aim behind the rituals he is involved in, which is to generate fertility and blessing. In this chapter I describe the mechanics of the tests but I also lay the groundwork for a later analysis (in Part II of the thesis) that will show how the senior *panjaka*, in conjunction with his subjects, accesses this life-giving force. ‘Testing’ is thus shown to underpin society explaining why it is perceived as constructive.

Alternative ideas about ‘testing’ are to be found in the literature on Madagascar; Middleton, notably, talks of how the *Karembola* of the deep south enjoy regulated ‘testing’ within their own

confederacy between groups who regard themselves as equals, '*mpirahambane*' [Middleton 1988:121-168]. However, *Karembola* 'testing' is strongly connected to culturally elaborated notions of honour and shame [*henatse*] and aims to create dependency; it cannot be said to be productive (of authority and of life) in the same way as the *Sahafatra* case. The *Sahafatra* material therefore merits further analysis in order to broaden our understanding of the motives for, and applications of, 'testing' in Madagascar.

Section 1: the process of testing

The duties of leadership are so onerous that few people actively want to become senior *panjaka*. If you are a senior *panjaka* there is a constant need to prove your worth, both in terms of leadership qualities and the ability to provide for the insatiable needs of your subjects. Both Minders of the One House and Earth-Shakers are prey to the demands of their subjects, but it is Earth-Shakers who are subject to the greatest predation because they represent the upper end of the hierarchy. As people selected from a pool of candidates drawn from the extended lineage to represent all the Fertiles of one Belly they are regarded as specially ‘privileged’ individuals. They must possess remarkable qualities to justify their position. However, it is not enough to surmise that these qualities exist, the leaders must be tested to give them an opportunity to prove that they exist.

Qualities sought in an Earth-Shaker

An Earth-Shaker rules because of what he is and what he can do, rather than of because who he is. He is chosen because he is thought to fulfil the requirements necessary for carrying out the role of a senior *panjaka*. His election depends on personal attributes and character (ideally he should be strong, have great powers of endurance, be honest, fair and incorruptible, both fierce and moderate by turns), but most importantly it depends on his wealth, measured typically in cattle. Although, as I have said, good character is desirable it is not a requisite for leadership as long as a *panjaka* has a lot of cattle to make up for his deficiencies. Consequently many *panjaka*, chosen because they happen to be rich, behave like spoilt little children: they want to be given little presents, they want to be flattered, they are oversensitive to implicit criticism, they get drunk and become argumentative getting ever more pedantic. We have witnessed pointless discussions about which comes first, Christmas or New Year, and about who owns the Boeing planes flying overhead; in each case the *panjaka* present insisted on being right, unreasonably using his authority to overrule everyone else.

Wealth, above all else then, is the key to power; a potential Earth-Shaker must have many cows

at his disposal (normally between 20 and 30) to be considered. Normally it is super-rich men, metaphorically referred to as ‘the owners of a thousand head of a cattle’ [*panarivo*], who are most likely to be selected and rated highly as senior *panjaka*. This is the case for *Iaban’i Berlet*, the Old Woman of the *Masitafika*. He is not an impressive physical specimen; he is old and wizened and bent-double from a perpetual cough [*kohaka*]. Neither is he well educated; he cannot read or write and relies on close relatives to help him with his sums so that he doesn’t get cheated when he sells his coffee to the shops. However, since he is said to have over a hundred head of cattle (and extensive coffee groves) he is still regarded as an ideal *panjaka*. His subjects never cease commenting on the size of his exceptional stone-walled ‘cattle-pen’ [*valan-aomby*] despite the fact that it is normally empty. They know it is empty so that the cows can be fattened up on the hoof 24 hours a day, out of sight of their greedy, feasting eyes.

In a way the wealth a potential Earth-Shaker possesses is manifest proof of the existence of the other desired characteristics. A rich man is a living symbol of success, a talisman, whatever his physical appearance or level of education. He has already proved his fecundity through the amassing of life-giving wealth. However, if he is to be a leader it is not enough just to do it for himself, he must do it for his subjects too. The all-consuming question for the subjects is whether a potential candidate has the means to complete the ritual obligations that will ensue if he is elected to office? For, once he is elected a process begins whereby he must continually demonstrate his worth by sacrificing cattle for them. This is not simply a redistribution of wealth (although this is the most immediate and tangible thrill for the participants) it is also an offering at the communal altar designed to promote general welfare.

The importance of cattle

The importance of sacrifice in local thought explains why it is critical that the wealth of a *panjaka* be in cattle [cf Kent 1979:84-88 on similar 17th century *Antanosy* attitudes]. Cattle are critical not just because wealth is generally stored in them (they are walking savings accounts and accepted currency in a world without banks) but also because they are the ideal sacrificial offering at life-cycle rituals such as those undertaken for circumcision, marriage and death.

Cattle are not just an alternative to money, they are special symbolic objects to be used in specific, culturally sanctioned ways [cf Elli 1993].

The special nature of cows is attested to by the attention people pay to the informal 'rules' governing how they are used. The most poignant 'rule' states that cows should not be sold at market [*tsy tokony mivarotra aomby an'bazary*] but should be reserved for communal consumption at public ceremonies. Those who do sell cattle to the butcher in *Vondrozo* are disapproved of because, for the sake of personal profit, they are prepared to undermine the social and natural relations that rely on the proper handling and circulation of cattle.

The illicit nature of the sale of cows means that many business deals are struck in private, with cows being transported for slaughter to far away *Farafangana* under the cover of darkness so that no-one might see¹. Even those buying meat from the local butcher seem to have mixed feelings about what they are doing, keeping quiet about their purchase and hiding it at the bottom of their bag. They are excited because they are allowing themselves the rare treat of eating beef, but they are nervous and shifty because they know they are involved in a slightly selfish and anti-social activity. After all, if everyone sold their cows to the butcher and everyone bought meat the consequences would be bad: firstly eating beef would become a mundane and everyday activity, and secondly cows might run out making it impossible to carry out the life-cycle rituals which rely on cattle as sacrificial offerings [cf Lienhardt 1961:21].

There are several practical and symbolic reasons why cattle are thought of as the essential sacrificial 'gift'; most important of these is the fact that cows are regarded as the best substitutes for human beings². Sacrifice is essentially regarded as the exchange of one highly valued life for the heightened well-being and fertility of others. To be effective, therefore, the animal sacrificed has to be as 'alive' as possible, as close an approximation to a human being as possible, and as valuable as possible. Since cows are admired for their strength and vigour³, since they are said to be the same as human beings⁴ except for the fact that they cannot talk [*tsy afaka miteny, izany mahabiby ny aomby*], and since they are each worth a small fortune (enough to provide about a thousand rice meals), they are the perfect choice [cf Elli 1993].



Cattle trample the fields and are sacrificed

In addition to their sacrificial ‘exchange’ value cows have tremendous ‘use’ value. This ‘use’ value derives not from a general usefulness (cows are not treated as beasts of burden; neither are they milked) but through one single, vital practical activity that they perform. Their power and energy is reserved for one task, and one task only: that of trampling the flooded rice-paddies [*manosy*] in preparation for sowing and planting [cf Elli 1993:45]. Cattle are vital to rice production because they are irreplaceable elements at this point in the work cycle. If there were no cattle the earth and water would not be mixed properly in the paddy (for there are no tractors or ploughs that could do the job instead) and production would come to a halt. For the people of *Sahafatra* this would be catastrophic because rice, which is their staple food (to be eaten three times a day if possible) is equated with life ⁵. Recognition of this state of affairs, that without cattle there would be no rice and no life, leads people to attribute to them a sacred quality; they are said to be ‘*masy*’ which roughly translates as vital and efficacious.

Cattle are loved by men for the combined roles that they play in their lives: the wealth and vitality they symbolize, the life they give (through work and death), and the tasty meat they provide. This love of cattle makes men unwilling to give them up for others; they are so attached to them that they have to be forced to give them up. That people fight over cows [*miady aomby*] provides a perpetual reminder to everyone of just how valuable they are ⁶; people recognise how great a personal sacrifice it is to lose a cow and this underlines what a worthy and efficacious sacrificial beast it is. Cattle are more than essential necessities, they are sacred and loved beings also [cf Wilson 1992:76-83]. Thus their sacrifice is particularly painful and potent. This, then, is why potential *panjaka* must have wealth in cattle: in life they produce rice which sustains, and in death their sacrifice generates the blessing which safeguards the living and makes them fertile.

The need to capture leaders

As has been hinted at above, the benefits of being a senior *panjaka* are generally regarded as being outweighed by the burdens of enforced ‘giving’. Consequently there is often a need to actually ‘capture’ leaders who would not volunteer themselves under normal circumstances. The

need to ‘capture’ is heightened by the fact that those actively aiming to be *panjaka* are often considered inappropriate candidates because of their ambition whereas, conversely, those who shun the role are thought of as ideal [*panjaka* are therefore always victims unlike many divine kings who only become victims if they fail in their duties cf Simonse 1992:372-373]. This is why people must be forced into accepting positions of responsibility. Thus when people refer to ‘capturing’ a new *panjaka* this must in some senses be taken literally [cf Feierman 1996:46 for comparative literature on the leader as a hostage ⁷].

An event known as the ‘first capture’ [*fanambori-voaloha*] is how people envisage the career of a senior *panjaka* beginning. The stereotypical account below is not necessarily how it actually happens but it is how informants describe it, and how it ought to happen in a perfect world unaffected by unforeseen circumstances and practical considerations. The picture given is the ideal one, whereby a living [*mbola velo*], but worn out [*valaky*], senior *panjaka* passes on his position ⁸ to a younger man. As we have noted one may become a senior *panjaka* in many other ways; however the organised hand-over is the most fitting and appropriate way, if it is at all possible. All the other ways are less desirable variations on the same theme.

When it has been decided by the old *panjaka* (or by his close followers if he is dead) who should succeed him rapid action is taken to realise the royal edict. It is said that the *panjaka* ‘offers’ [*manolotra*] his position to his chosen candidate; however this phrasing hides the fact that acceptance of the offer is obligatory. This is why the process is universally viewed as a ‘capture’ ⁹. The new *panjaka* who, unbeknownst to him, has been ‘chosen’, must now be physically ‘captured’ [*samborina*]. The news is kept secret because if he should hear of it in advance he might run away [*milefa*] in order to avoid the onerous burden of responsibility [*mavesatra ny adidy*] associated with the post.

A messenger, accompanied by warriors, creeps up stealthily to the house, trying to avoid detection, so that he may take the new *panjaka* by surprise. On arrival at the house of the future *panjaka* the messenger sounds the conch shell [*mampaneno ny antsiva amin’ny varangara*] three times as loudly as he can at the threshold. The trumpeting of the shell attracts a lot of attention because it is normally only blown in cases of emergency or on ritual occasions ¹⁰. As people rush

out of their houses and gather round the messenger publicly announces the capture of the ruler to be.

It is too late now for the chosen man to flee since he has officially been informed of his 'election' in front of witnessing bystanders. To flee after having been officially informed is thought of as shameful [*mahamenatra*] and anyone who attempts to do so is 'fined several cows' [*sazina aomby maro*]; in addition the family of the refugee loses the right to hold any position of authority in the future. This custom is so rigidly upheld that many lineages are barred in perpetuity from ever having an Earth-Shaker. The *Antemahavelo* Belly of the *Vohilakatra* clan, which consists of 8 lineages, provides a case in point: of those 8 lineages only 3 are eligible to provide Earth-Shakers [*mahazo kobatany*]; the rest are barred because of the irresponsible behaviour of leaders drawn from their number in the past ¹¹.

After his capture the chosen man is summoned to the Fertile/Big-House of the old *panjaka*; having accepted his destiny he should go quietly and without fuss. The purpose of this visit is to temporarily transfer the ceremonial headgear, a red cloth known as the '*soto mena*', from the old to the new *panjaka*. The new *panjaka* is 'crowned' [*sotoina*] momentarily before handing the headgear back. This signifies that he has formally accepted the new role and that he is prepared to take over in the future. At this point he is not yet a *panjaka* since the temporary transfer is a statement of intent, not the actual realisation of power. The old *panjaka* still reigns until the new one is fully 'raised up' at a later date. The brief coronation commits the new *panjaka* to his role and acts as definitive proof that the selected man has now been truly 'captured'.

All these precautions and threats of punitive action are necessary because the role of *panjaka* is not one that all people accept gladly. When a *panjaka* is captured he becomes an involuntary hostage, imprisoned [*igadra*] by his duties. Tests are diverted onto him and he becomes a sort of heroic champion protecting [*miar*] the people. The *panjaka* is like a gladiator; he is a potential sacrificial victim who must fight for his own survival as well as for the well-being of the people who chose him to represent them. Once captured [*samborina*] his freedom rests in the hands of his subjects [cf de Heusch 1985: 103-107 for a comparable example of Swazi

subjects controlling their king]; he is only released [*afaka*] when the people allow or demand it [*arakarak'ny hevitrana'olo*].

The most senior Earth-Shaker of the *Vohilakatra* clan provides a fine example of a man unwillingly trapped in his position and subjected to unbearable pressures. After only a year in power at *Miarinarivo* the effect of the crushing weight of responsibility was all too clear to see; compared to his former imposing self he was a shrunken and hollow figure, as thin as a rake and suffering repeated bouts of fever [*voa ny tazo*]. We would often find him wrapped up in a blanket in his Big-House, too ill to venture outside. Glad of our company he would invite us in, all smiley and soft-spoken, to moan about his problems.

'Ruling the land is hard' [*mafy be ny fitondra tany*], he would complain as he donned his faded grey trilby over his skeletal shaven head. 'The territory is too big and the *panjaka* receives no money for his efforts' [*malalaka loatra ny faritra ny Vohilakatra; tsy misy fandraisam-bola ny panjaka*]. Shivering gently he would gather his own children around him, huddling them into his robes while the Eye of the Water shooed off onlookers who were disturbing the *panjaka* by making too much noise and blocking off the light from the door. Then he would continue. He outlined why the job was too demanding: there were so many disputes to resolve that there was no time to rest; having to liaise with gendarmes and angry armed deputations from other clans made him perpetually anxious; whenever a meeting was called he was required to provide the food [cf Adler 1982:180 for a comparable case in Chad] which meant he always had to be on the lookout for a cow [*mahita aomby*]..... The list was endless. He explained how, already tired of his duties and physically exhausted, he had begged leave to resign his post. After a short dramatic pause he looked up, smiling wistfully, to add that, of course, the people had not agreed [*tsy manaiky*] and that therefore his request had been refused. He had to struggle on.

Although this example is quite typical not all *panjaka* felt the same. Young, strong, vital, and newly elected *panjaka* in particular presented a prouder and more resilient image and would never admit to weakness or to the possibility of failure. These men tended to be gruff and fearsome, unwilling to waste energy on unnecessary talk. The Earth-Shaker at *Anandaka* (clan *Antsoro*) is a good example. All the people we visited in his village were unwilling to answer

questions about *panjaka* lest they commit a taboo [*fady*] and be punished by their leader. Consequently they referred our questions upwards and took us to see the Earth-Shaker himself. He was an immense physical presence in the Fertile, silent and uncompromising. He was not unfriendly but neither was he forthcoming; only when we had explained the purpose of our journey three times did he agree to talk to us through the Eye of the Water. After that he was disdainfully accommodating. His apparent immovability, both emotional and physical, generated an impression of great power and control which to an extent explained the hold he had over his subjects.

Ritual activities: proving yourself worthy

The initial capture is the first stage of a long process. To be a successful leader of a Big-House a Minder of the One House must have and continue to earn the respect of his subjects. To do this he must prove his worth, not just by behaving well on a day to day level, but by fulfilling ritual obligations and following a difficult and ‘testing’ ceremonial procedure [cf Simonse 1992:214-231 on how the tension underlying the relationship with the king unifies the people]. Once he has been ‘chosen’ and ‘captured’ he must sponsor and hold a series of ceremonies. Initially he must organise and take part in a gathering known as the Black Wine [*toa-mity*]. This is a type of initiation and also serves as public recognition of his new position. After this has been performed he must mastermind his own ‘raising up’ ceremony [*sandratra panjaka*]. This is explicitly designed to raise him up above his subjects and to make him senior to them, which as we shall see is a tricky and expensive undertaking. It is not sufficient to hold this ‘raising up’ ceremony only once; it must be repeated at regular intervals for as long as a Minder of the One House stays in office. The cycle of ceremonies not only continually re-affirms the authority of a Minder of the One House, it also serves to promote the general ‘fertility’ of the land and the group. In fact it is this perceived generation of ‘fertility’ that really guarantees the position of the leader. A Minder of the One House must play a key role in this generation. How this is achieved will also be discussed later.

Earth-Shakers, like Minders of the One House, must prove their worthiness to rule over their

subjects. Due to their more senior position the tests they must endure are more extensive than those undergone by Minders of the One House. The format of the tests is however the same. Initially there must be a Black-Wine ceremony; this must be followed by a longer series of repeated, cyclical 'raising up' ceremonies than that demanded of Minders of the One House. The testing of an Earth-Shaker is not an arbitrary and useless process simply designed to prove his worth, it also serves a practical function as it contributes to the fertility of the land. Since Earth-Shakers are more concretely associated with the land than Minders of the One House their contribution to the land is considered to be significantly more influential. By passing the tests an Earth-Shaker secures his position twofold: he proves his worth and rejuvenates the land and the people.

The Black Wine ceremony

The first official duty of a senior *panjaka* is to hold the Black Wine [*toa-mity*] party. The Black Wine [*toa-mity*] is the name of the event that marks the public beginning of the career of the senior *panjaka*. It is specifically likened to an announcement [*fanambara*] of his accession. As has been described, the old *panjaka* who is ‘tired out’ [*valaky*] from his duties has already ‘offered’ his position to a new younger man who has subsequently been captured and briefly be-hatted [*mampisartoka*]. The old man, described as a ‘father’ [*iaba*], has offered a junior, someone regarded as a ‘child’ [*anaka*], his ‘position’ [*toera*].

This event (the capture) is said to have happened ‘yesterday’ [*omaly*] or the day before yesterday [*oratrony*] in relation to the Black Wine [*toa-mity*], but this is only figurative; it may have happened several months ago. This means that after the ‘offer’ (which cannot be refused) has been made, and it has been agreed that the new *panjaka* will take over control, there is still plenty of time for him to consult a diviner [*panandro*] in order to appoint an auspicious day for the hand-over. This day is the day of the Black Wine [*toa-mity*] ceremony. The Black Wine [*toa-mity*] is only for limited public consumption; only members of the one relevant Belly [*troky*] (Family of Big-Houses made up of people affiliated to one Great Ancestor) should be present. It is an intermediate stage, situated in between the initial paranoid secrecy of the selection process (involving the physical capture of the new *panjaka*) and the explicitly public celebrations that will take place when the new *panjaka* is officially ‘raised up’ at a separate ceremony known as the ‘*sandraatra panjaka*’.

The Black Wine [*toa-mity*] is the explicit public recreation of the first essentially private capture [*fanambori-voaloha*] which most likely took place in isolation somewhere out in the countryside. Consequently it is alternatively referred to as the ‘second capture’ [*fanambori-faharoa*]. The Black Wine [*toa-mity*] is also likened to the stage in the marriage procedure when the bride is announced and ‘comes out’ [*fiboa-bady*]. The comparison is based on the fact that in both cases, that of the Black Wine and the ‘coming out’, a person is being introduced and made visible, and an initial informal social contract is being entered into.

The senior *panjaka* is likened to a wife in more ways than one, however: like a wife he is taken as an unwilling captive (there are echoes of how women were captured by force to be taken as wives in the past) and like a wife he will be ceremonially ‘raised up’ [*manakatra*] ¹² by others. Unlike a wife, though, the senior *panjaka* is not a woman. This obvious difference is the critical one. A real wife has the upper hand over her promoters (the husband’s family) because if she is dissatisfied with her treatment she will leave and, crucially, take her children with her. She is the owner of the children because her fertility is not in question; it is the promoters who must constantly earn the right to keep her and her offspring ¹³. The senior *panjaka*, a pseudo wife to his subjects, is in the reverse position to the real wife. His promoters have the upper hand over him because his fertility, unlike the straightforward and undeniable biological fertility of a woman, is in serious doubt. In order to free himself he must prove his fertility and munificence by alternative ritual means; until he does he remains obliged to those who raised him up.

What is ‘*toa-mity*’: the nature of the Black Wine ceremony

‘*Toa-mity*’ is traditional alcohol, a sort of black coloured wine that was made out of fermented wild berries in the time before the foreigners [*vazaha frantsay*] came. The party consists of the offering of the Black Wine to the people. The Black Wine [*toa-mity*] is said to be the ‘root’ of what makes a senior *panjaka* [cf Errington 1989:205-206 on origin points and ‘roots’] as it begins to secure him in his position [*mahafototra*]. It is the start of a difficult process of negotiation between the senior *panjaka* and the people, which is likened to a long journey [*dia lava*]. To give the Black Wine really starts a *panjaka* on his way; to not give prematurely ends his career. The Black Wine ceremony [*toa-mity*] must be done by all senior *panjaka*; as the people say ‘those that do not complete it will not last’ [*tsy mahavita, tsy mahazaka*].

The giving of the Black Wine is like the satisfaction of the demand for a pound of flesh (my metaphor); it is a bargain based on the willingness to give up life for fame. The Black Wine is explicitly likened to blood [*ra*] and drinking it is believed (by the old in particular) to fortify the body [*mahamatanjaka*]. This is why for many people wine is the favoured tittle over and above the local rum. Wine has potent associations; it is the life-blood of one transferred to the many.

In the past 4 bottles of black wine had to be amassed and given away for public consumption for a man to satisfy the first test of a senior *panjaka*. The *panjaka* himself provided two bottles and other family members (eg the elder brother [*zoky*] or the sister [*anakavy*]) made up the deficit. Now the event has turned into a party [*hira*] and although the *panjaka* must provide great quantities of alcoholic drink, the drink is not necessarily wine and the guests are ashamed if they do not bring a contribution also.

Black Wine, as it originally was, no longer exists and in the main ‘*toaka fary*’, a rough local home-distilled rum, a Malagasy [*gasy*] moonshine, has been substituted. Sweet red wine made from low quality grapes grown in the highlands and bought out of huge barrels in the local shops is also consumed and is still the choice of older folk who value the associations with the original ‘*toa-mity*’, and who regard cane rum as too strong. Foreigners, specifically the French, are blamed for accustoming the Malagasy to rum [*ny vazaha mahatama ny gasy amin'ny toaka fary*]. With their help the idiom has changed from ‘adding blood’ [*ampiana ra*], to competitively drinking excessively strong booze. The ceremony has become less of a vital distribution of life-essence and more of a ritually combative knees-up where serious drinkers aim for nirvana-like oblivion by consuming far more than they can take [*tokony minome be loatra*].

Despite the changes, the Black Wine ceremony [*toa-mity*] is essentially the same as it was in the past; although the substance consumed is different it remains a gift giving occasion which plays on ideas of reciprocity in order to determine who is senior to who. In normal circumstances when gifts are exchanged between equals it is the gift-giver who gains the position of seniority; the receiver is demoted to a junior position until he/she reciprocates in some way. However, when those involved in a gift exchange are not perceived as equals to start with, the grammar is different: in this situation both giving a gift to a junior and receiving one from him/her simply reinforces ones superior position: by giving one demonstrates generosity and munificence, by receiving one merely accepts appropriate tribute.

The consequence of this dual grammar is that in order to interpret the gift-giving of the *panjaka* we must know whether he is regarded as senior, equal, or junior to his subjects? This may seem like a ridiculous question but it actually gets at the heart of the matter. Although the senior

panjaka is unquestionably senior in ordinary life there are certain ritual occasions (notably the Black Wine and the 'raising up' [*sandraatra panjaka*]) when the senior *panjaka* is ritually abased and cut down to size, as the subjects remind him of his reliance on their support. The result of this is that there is a perpetual question as to whether the *panjaka* is senior or junior to his subjects. This uncertainty generates a tension that the *panjaka* is obliged to try and resolve throughout his career. By giving presents to his subjects one could argue that the *panjaka* is demonstrating his superiority as he is the provider; the fact is though that the subjects refuse to accept the implied inferiority of their position, the gift given them after all simply being their due for raising him up in the first place. In their minds the *panjaka's* gift is not enough [*tsy ampy*] to compensate for his massive promotion.

When you give a gift you are thanked by people in authority as a dutiful child - 'We have a child!' they say [*manan-anaka ahay!*]. In this view it is accepted as only right and proper, as natural, that tribute should flow upwards; your gift cannot bridge what is an gaping chasm of status, in fact, as we have noted, it merely reinforces it. However gifts may also be received by calling you a father [*iabako*], a humble stance recognising the generosity of the giver and the privilege involved in receiving a gift and at least momentarily accepting a junior position. The idiom used depends on your relative position, on the context of the gift and on personality and mood. The existence of the two idioms demonstrates how reciprocal relations are expected. There is no one way traffic of gifts; both children and fathers are expected to give them. By dramatically giving valuable gifts the senior *panjaka* is trying to leap the status chasm. In a relatively undefined relationship (after all a *panjaka* rules over generations both senior and junior to him) he wants to generate a strong impression of himself. As I have already noted a new *panjaka* is referred to as a 'child' [*anaka*] by his predecessor. This label, which the subjects latch on to and adopt, is one that the *panjaka* wants and needs to be rid of in order to become an authoritative, ruling father figure. He attempts to dispose of his child-like image by creating such a gift imbalance that no one can doubt his transformation from a 'child' (who owes and is duty bound to give) to a 'father' (who is owed but gives out of generosity to display his munificence). This cannot be achieved with small gifts; the gifts must be monstrously large (ie a cow, a super-valuable) so that no-one can mistake what side of the symbolic generational divide he lies on. If a ruler impresses his subjects they will respond by commenting that he is not their child but

their father [*tsy anakay fa iabanay*].

The first gift of the Black Wine decides nothing; it is a preliminary ‘sparring match’ [*ady kidy fa tsy tena ady be*] and a statement of intent by both sides. The senior *panjaka* gives a taster (the Black Wine), hinting at his potentially infinite bounty but refusing to give too much away. The people present a barely disguised demand for an ever increasing ransom [*hataka*]; as far as they are concerned he must pay out, ‘cough up’ and ‘vomit’ his wealth [*mandoa vola*] from now on, for as long as he is in office. The Black Wine signals the start of a battle of wills and resources that will be played out again and again throughout a senior *panjaka's* life.

The mechanics of the ritual

Black Wine ceremonies tend to be held in the ceremonial season which stretches from June through October. These months are ideal for festivities because the weather is dry and cool, most of the agricultural work for the year is over, the rice granaries are full, and the cash crops (notably coffee and pepper) are ripe and can be sold to raise the money necessary to sponsor the ceremonies. We witnessed four Black Wine ceremonies which took place over this period, two for the *Masitafika* clan, one for the *Vohilakatra*, and one for the *Antsoro*. The small number we attended can be accounted for by the semi-private nature of the event (which made it harder to hear about) and by the fact that people did not realise that we would be interested and eager to come, if asked.

Once we had been invited we were always treated as one of the group. We took our own alcoholic tribute and then proceeded to melt into the drunken haze. We were never placed in a particular spot and soon came to realise that this was the whole point: at the Black Wine everyone should be crammed into the limited space of the house until the crowd can hardly move. Three out of four of the ceremonies were straightforward hand-overs of power, however the fourth involved the ‘separating off’ [*misaraka*] of one Family to create a new independent Big-House/Fertile. The procedure for both versions is essentially the same although when a new Big-House/Fertile is created the ceremonial headgear [*soto mena*] cannot be handed-over from



'Panjaka' and Royal Woman at Black Wine Ceremony surrounded by the mass of subjects

the old *panjaka* to the new, but must be bought afresh. The only other major difference is that at the inauguration of a new Big-House/Fertile representatives of all the Clan Bellies must be there (instead of just the members of the one relevant Belly normally required to attend such an event) in order to deliver official recognition of its new status.

At a standard event the guests from the one Belly arrive in groups throughout the morning. They all bear locally distilled rum [*toaka*] which they present as a barbed tribute to the new *panjaka*. Their liquid gift is a lightly veiled demand for reciprocation or even super-reciprocation and the receiving *panjaka* should try to at least match, and if at all possible surpass, the quantities provided in order to maintain his honour. As each group presents rum [*toaka*] there is a certain etiquette to be followed. Thanks and recognition for the gift should be given by an equal: thus when a senior *panjaka* offers rum or money a senior *panjaka* should answer in reply; when an Eye of the Water offers rum or money an Eye of the Water should respond ¹⁴. The rum [*toaka*] is then drunk by everyone and the house becomes very crowded and merry, full of the family of the senior *panjaka*, members of the Family of Big-Houses [*troky iray*] and close neighbours. The most important senior *panjaka* sit by the opening in the east wall; otherwise the seating arrangement is purposefully random.

The handing over of the hat

When representatives from all the Fertiles/Big-Houses [*lonaky/trano-be*] of the One Belly [*troky iray*] have arrived the crux of the ceremony begins. The ritual hangs on the presentation or handing over of the ruler's headgear, the '*soto-mena*' [cf Feeley-Harnik 1982: 36 for comment on other Malagasy royal regalia, specifically the emblematic 'long iron' (*vy lava*) of the *Sakalava* monarchs]. The '*soto-mena*' is a sort of handkerchief sized piece of red material, red being a royal colour, which is tied bandanna style on the head of a senior *panjaka* ¹⁵. The '*soto-mena*' is handed over from one *panjaka* to the next. A specially selected member of the one Belly (who stands in the relation of sister's son [*zanak'anakavy*] to the replacement *panjaka*) takes off the hat of the previous *panjaka* and transfers it to the head of the new, thereby 'crowning' him.

The senior *panjaka* is not being crowned by an object that is precious in itself; it is not expensive [*tsy lafo*], in fact the item has hardly any pecuniary value at all (it is made of a strip of ordinary material bought from the shop). He is being crowned with the 'hopes' [*fanontania*] and expectations of his subjects. He is honoured by the entrustment of the land to him [*tany omen'an'azy*] but the price he pays is the heavy burden of office. The 'soto-mena' is a sign of control but it is emphasised by the people that it is only a symbol; no power is thought to reside in the object itself which is just a piece of cloth [*tsy mahery ny soto fa lamba avao*]. It is explicitly stated that "the 'soto-mena' does not really make the *panjaka* a *panjaka*, it merely shows that he is one" [*tsy tena mahapanjaka ny soto, mampiseho fa panjaka avao*]. To make the point absolutely clear informants likened the 'soto-mena' to a mundane gendarme's uniform [*mitovy amin'ny fitafy zandarma*], which is generally recognised to be an exterior symbol, not a source, of power ¹⁶ [*Sahafatra* royal regalia is thus not infused with power, unlike in many parts of southeast Asia cf Errington 1989:123-129].

The 'soto-mena' is owned by the people but worn by the *panjaka* [*minday soto ny panjaka nefa ny vahoaka no tompony*], who is by extension also owned. Without the 'soto-mena' the senior *panjaka* is quite an anonymous figure; however since the 'soto-mena' is not his own possession but that of his subjects he may only wear it on special occasions when they wish it, not on his own whim. Therefore although it marks him out it also asserts his hostage status. The 'soto-mena' is an unattainable object for the senior *panjaka*; he must try and earn it but he may never call it his own [*tsy an'azy*] while he lives. If it is deemed that he has deserved it, it may be allowed for him to be buried with the 'soto-mena' when he is dead, as a final belated recognition of his greatness.

The 'soto-mena' is a contested object but the contest is always lost by the senior *panjaka*. The first demonstration of his domination by others is given at the Black Wine [*toa-mity*]. Once he has been crowned (not by his own hand) he may not take off the 'soto-mena' for the rest of the ceremony. This is a problem for the *panjaka* because as everyone crowds into the house the atmosphere gets closer and closer, and irritatingly hot. As he sweats the subjects joke about his discomfiture, revelling in the fact that it is they, not he, who will decide when he should be relieved of the 'soto-mena'. The whole event becomes increasingly drunk and rowdy as the room

is crammed full. Eventually when the overwroughtness has become almost unbearable and the sun starts to go down [*miandry ny maso-andro miririna*], the event is brought to an official end by the removal of the 'soto-mena' [*ny fanesorina ny soto amin'ny loha*]. The appointed Sister's Son rises from his place beside the senior *panjaka* and removes the 'soto-mena' ¹⁷. The *panjaka* himself, temporarily released and relieved of his burden, pays three litres of rum [*toaka*] to his subjects for the privilege of his transient freedom. This is swiftly consumed before the party finally breaks up and everyone disperses.

The ‘raising-up’ of the senior *panjaka* [*sandratra panjaka*]

A few weeks, or even months, after the Black Wine [*toa-mity*] the senior *panjaka* is officially raised up by the people at the event known as the ‘*sandratra panjaka*’. The ‘*sandratra panjaka*’ is a very public event and all the clan and surrounding groups are called to attend and witness the ceremony [*havory ny vava-rano iray, ny fokon'olo, ny tana manodidina*]. The ceremony involves the gathering and positioning of the so called subjects in relation to the captured senior *panjaka*. Once this arrangement is satisfactorily achieved, a cow given by the senior *panjaka* must be slaughtered in the name of the group [cf Kent 1979:84 for 17th century *Antanosy* equivalent]. This cow is known as the ‘sharp cow’ [*aomby maranitra*] or perhaps more appropriately ‘the cow that really hurts’ [*mamparary manome aomby*]. It hurts because it is so painful to give, but it is sharp also because the sacrifice of something valuable is efficacious [*masy*] in the quest for increased fertility.

A senior *panjaka* is not raised up only once in his career; the ‘*sandratra panjaka*’ is part of an ongoing and cyclical/repetitive process that takes place every few years. At each ‘*sandratra panjaka*’ a cow must be given by the man being ‘raised up’. It is said that at least three cows (and therefore at least three ceremonies) are needed to ‘make’ a Minder of the One House [*aomby telo mahapanjaka*]; however more are required for the most senior positions. It used to be necessary for an Earth-Shaker [*kobatany*] to give six cows to attain full recognition; now that number has been reduced to four because of the general perception that everyone has fallen on hard times¹⁸. Each successive cow that is given is nominally allocated to a section of the group. The first one is said to be for the ‘young warriors’ [*panabaka*], the second one for the Women [*viavy*] and the third one for the immediate Family [*fianakavia*]. This allocation is in word only to honour each respective section and to chart the progress of the gifts of the *panjaka*. The division of the cow remains essentially the same although the named privileged section may receive slightly more generous portions than usual.

The grammar of the event is quite clear: there is a circular arrangement whereby the subjects [*fokon'olo*] repeatedly capture the senior *panjaka* and the senior *panjaka* in turn pays his dues [*mandoa*] to renew the polity, renew his contract with the people and be temporarily ‘freed’

[*maha-afaka*]. In the process fertility is generated. The crucial question for the senior *panjaka* is whether he can cope with the obligations, stay the course and survive for the full term. Eventually all senior *panjaka* become worn out [*valaky/lany*]. Old senior *panjaka* become unable to carry out their responsibilities because they are too tired; they lose any appetite they may have had for the job and are replaced [*sohafana*].

The newly elected senior *panjaka* does not necessarily regard himself as 'lucky' [*atojony*] or fortunate, in fact he is often rather sorry for himself [*malahelo*]. Normally he does not think of himself as ready for a role which involves 'heavy responsibilities' [*adidy mavesatra*], 'long journeys' [*dia lava*] and 'terrible expenses' [*depenses be*]; however he is obliged to take over anyway [*voatery miakatra*]. When a new leader is asked if he is happy [*faly*] about his promotion he most often responds by laughing at the ridiculous nature of the question. He looks with contempt at the questioner as if to say 'Of course I am not happy'; to be happy would be to admit ambition and complacency, encouraging his subjects to treat him even more harshly.

We witnessed 10 '*sandraatra panjaka*' in various clan territories; three were ceremonies to raise up Earth-Shakers and seven were for Minders of the One House. The ceremonies for Earth-Shakers and Minders of the One House are essentially the same the only differences being in the privileges allowed for the different grades. The prototypical case I describe below is for the most senior rulers as they have the most privileges and therefore provide the most graphic and all inclusive account. I am however careful to indicate in the text at appropriate moments the specific differences: whether or how long they are allowed to don the '*soto-mena*'; what type of ceremonial robe [*lamba*] they are allowed to wear; whether they are allowed to perambulate around the house and triumphantly bang the walls etc All but one of the ceremonies we attended resulted from the death or abdication of previous *panjaka*. In one remarkable case though a *panjaka* was being removed and replaced by the popular will of the people. The procedure was exactly the same but the atmosphere was completely different; everybody was very tense, unwilling to talk about what was going on, and continually emphasising how 'difficult' [*sarotra*] it was. Our attendance at this event affected the rest of our stay as it was assumed by our presence that we supported the new *panjaka*. He became our friend but the village of the 'evicted' *panjaka* became one of the few places we were obviously not welcome.

The '*sandraatra panjaka*', like the Black Wine, tends to be held in the dry, cool season [*asotry*]; ideally it should be held in October [*volambitabe*]¹⁹, as this is thought to be the most auspicious month of all [cf Beaujard 1983a:310 for confirmation], and on a Friday, because that is the most 'powerful' [*mahery*] and 'male' [*lelahy*] day of the week. The ceremony is a high profile public event attracting many spectators. Consequently market women come from town to sell pre-prepared tasty titbits; they sit under the rice granaries [*trano-ambo*] where it is shady and cool and where they can set out their wares in view of the participants and passers by. As the morning progresses people arrive in columns, walking Indian file in ranking order, and present themselves at the Fertile/Big-House [*lonaky/trano-be*] where the old senior *panjaka* is holding his final court. Men carry umbrellas and walking sticks and wear long coats to look smart and authoritative. The old and new *panjaka* are positioned separately in two different houses. During the course of the morning the family of the new senior *panjaka* gather in the ordinary house allocated to them away from the Fertile of the old *panjaka* and explain the responsibilities and customs [*fomba*] of office to the new *panjaka* who waits there. Drink, given by the 'strangers' from outlying districts [*vahiny fokontany maro ambadika*] as they arrive, is served to the family of both the old and the new senior *panjaka*. When the rum [*toaka*] has been shared out the visiting 'strangers' greet [*manotsafa*]²⁰ the family of both the incoming and outgoing senior *panjaka*. After the greetings are finished the '*faha*' [rice meal] is given to the visitors [*vahiny*] by the local masters of the land [*tompon-tany*]. It is then customary to give the strangers a house of their own to rest in.

By two in the afternoon [*sondron andro*] representatives of all the Bellies [*troky*] (or Families of Big-Houses) should have arrived and the conch shell is blown in three short blasts [*mikoka intelo*]. The extended family of the old and new senior *panjaka* gather in their respective houses. In the nondescript house away from the Fertile [*lonaky*] of the old *panjaka* an appointed Sister's Son [*zanak'anakavy*] of the new *panjaka* places the '*soto-mena*' [*mampisartroka*] on the new *panjaka's* head²¹ and robes him [*mampisalapy*] with the ceremonial cloth²². The new *panjaka* then exits this house and heads in the direction of the Fertile [*lonaky*] as an unruly mob forms behind him. The procession moves from the ordinary house allocated to the new *panjaka* (the point of departure) to the Fertile of the old *panjaka* (the point of arrival), symbolising the handing-over of power and the changing ownership of the sacred house.

As the new *panjaka* walks in front, shoulders rounded and hunched forward, head hung low with humility, he is pushed forcefully from behind by all the men [*samy mangolika ny iabany*]. Despite his humble posture the new senior *panjaka* is clearly marked out by his bright headgear and consequently his subjects treat him like a trophy that has been won and which must now be displayed. His rough handling evokes the treatment meted out to thieves caught red handed who, hands tied behind their backs, are paraded round town, all the while being jeered at and jostled by the crowd, with the stolen goods hanging round their necks to shame them. The new senior *panjaka's* wife, the 'ampela-hova' [Royal Woman], undergoes similar treatment. As she exits the house in his wake and follows behind him she is in turn pushed by all the women [*samy mangolika ny Endriny sy ny Iabany*].

Although the new *panjaka* is violently pushed around on purpose his dignity is safeguarded by two assistants who flank him on either side, arms linked through his [*tantanana ny olo roa*] so that even if he stumbles he does not fall. There is a compromise in operation: the *panjaka* is bullied to show who is really in control but he is kept upright so that his authority is not completely compromised. In this position, half-supported and half knocked over, he is lead, still shoved from behind, three times²³ around the Big-House²⁴. People emit an unearthly moan as they process, chanting 'Father' [*iaba*] in a sliding two-noted dirge. When the third perambulation is over the new *panjaka* enters through the sacred opening in the east wall where there is someone waiting inside to take him by the hand [*mitanty*] lest he trips negotiating the step up. Inside a special place to the north-east has been set aside for the new *panjaka* to be seated. As the new *panjaka* takes his place the old *panjaka* is officially displaced and once again becomes an ordinary person [*olo tsotra*]. While this substitution is taking place the crowd outside violently bang and beat the walls and roof of the Fertile [*fihin'olo ny rindry sy tafitrano*] screaming and shouting in excitement. Then they flood inside, fighting to get a place, while the new *panjaka* looks on, solemn and miserable. Eventually after a few minutes of chaos and noise, the subjects subside and quieten, sinking to the floor of the house. Everything becomes still and silent.

The cow donated by the new *panjaka*, meanwhile, has been brought up'⁴ [*manakatra*] to the Fertile [*lonaky*] from wherever it has been hidden [*afina*] at the edge of the village. The colour

of the cow is not important but it must be a female or a castrated bull and it may not have any defects or deformities; cows that have 'no tail' [*boda*] or whose horn or tail are broken [*ponga*] or that ill in any way [*misy takaitra/marary*] are not acceptable. The 'healthy' cow is taunted and teased before being vigorously wrestled to the ground and roped up by the young men. Three of its legs are tied together but the front right is left loose. The mouth of the cow is tied shut also so that it may not moo [*mibarara/mitrena*] which is taboo [*fady*]²⁵. Everything is now set for the sacrifice. The conch shell is sounded again. Everyone takes off their hats [*bonetra*] and makes sure that no-one is standing to the east as an appointed person [*voatendry*] (not the new *panjaka* but ideally his Eye of the Water) calls *Zanahary* [creation] and then the ancestors to beg for blessing [*fitata*]. A typical call for blessing, taken from a *Masitafika* ceremony, is given below:

"Zanahary to the east, Zanahary to the north, Zanahary to the south, Zanahary to the west, powerful earth - listen! You who made the hands, who made the feet of all the living people here, You are called to the ceremony we have created. This Fertile raised by us, raised by the earth, raised by the work of the people - let it thrive, let it prosper! Coming from the east, the west, the south, the north, Zanahary has been called".

"The Masitafika are here also: Ramahafasa, Rasoza, Andrambaharoy, Tebiso, Renifatsy, Andrahamoky. The clan Bellies, each with their own land, have gathered. We give a cow, we [inclusive of Zanahary] will devour/use-up a cow, no matter whether it be a female or a castrated bull. Zanahary - visit the north, visit the south, go! Go also east, west, to the many tributaries. You want to consume this cow, you want to drink this rum. There, it is done!"²⁶.

With this completed the actual sacrifice takes place. Ritually cool water [*rano manara/manitsy*], taken from the dish containing the sacrificial knife to the east of the Fertile, is sprayed over the cow three times in order to lessen the danger involved in the sacrifice. This final preparation over with, the cow is killed. Its neck, vulnerable and upturned, is hacked open [*letaina*] by one of the young men. It's life can literally be heard draining out of it in a stream of air and blood. The blood of the cow, gushing out of the jugular vein, is collected in the dish holding the cool water; when this overflows another bowl is provided. The blood is taken off to be boiled, congealed

and eaten.

Meanwhile the cow is butchered and cut up. Initially the feet are hacked off with an axe with children frantically fighting over them, tugging and crying to get their hands on one. Then the tail of the cow [*rambon'aomby*], unceremoniously sliced off, is used to 'spray blood' [*fafy ra*] around the Big-House [*trano-be*]. Then the cow is skinned and its entrails and stomach contents removed. Finally, the main body of meat is cut into tidy portions which are laid out on banana leaves for distribution among the family and guests. As far as the people are concerned the sacrifice has been made: the life of the animal has been given to *Zanahary*, the blood to the earth, and the horns to the owner [cf Elli 1993:96 for the *Bara* equivalent]. All that is left is the physical residue, the meat, which they regard as their own and which is subsequently divided up between them; the best cut of meat, the fatty rump steak [*vodin'aomby*], is reserved for the new *panjaka* [cf Beaujard 1983a:311 for an exact *Tanala* parallel].

When the allocation of meat is complete rum [*toaka*] is drunk by all in thanksgiving; the first drops are poured onto the floor in the northeast corner (or in the centre) of the house. The '*soto-mena*' along with the ceremonial cloth [*lamba mena*] is now taken off. Once taken off neither can be put back on again the same day; it is taboo [*fady*] and if the *panjaka* disregards it he will be given a penalty fine [*sazina*]. Essentially the public part of the ceremony is now over so visitors begin to leave for home. When the visitors have all gone, happily carrying their share of the meat, the family stay on to celebrate [*masaka afara*]. All types of celebration [*fifalia*] get underway, orchestrated by the family; they eat, drink and dance in the Fertile [*lonaky*] late into the night. The next day, exhausted, they too return home laden with their share of the fatty rump steak [*vodin'aomby*]. The new *panjaka* is obliged to stay in the Big-House [*trano-be*] for a week or two to receive family visitors who come to greet him and pay their respects.

Analysis of the role of the Sister's Son

When a senior *panjaka* is 'raised up' the robes of office (hat and cloak) should be put on by the '*zanak'anakavy*', his Sister's Son. The explicit reason given for this is to do with security. To

be a senior *panjaka* is a difficult thing. Because there are grades and because not everyone can be one the 'raising up' is a natural arena for in-fighting brought on by competition, rivalry and jealousy. It also attracts danger from outside from other groups wanting to disable their opponents. Indeed there is fear that the *panjaka* may be stabbed by one of these outsiders [*mety manindrona an'azy amin'ny mesa ny olo-kafa*]. This is why the senior *panjaka* should be 'robed' [*sotoina*] by the Sister's Son. The Sister's son is in theory an in between person; not the closest of kin but not a complete outsider either. If the person robing them was too close it would be dangerous because they might be a potential replacement with vested interests. If the person robing them was too distant it would be dangerous because they are not committed to the same group and may try and disrupt it. By using the Sister's Son, in an intermediary position, to carry out the investiture the danger from inside and outside is minimised ²⁷. It is interesting that the major apparent concern is to guarantee the safety of the *panjaka* and not, as is so often the case for the Sister's Son in Madagascar, to demonstrate his (the Sister's Son) and his groups inferiority (related to their wife-taking status) in the local hierarchy [cf Middleton 1988:345-443 for a *Karembola* antithesis].

I have talked about 'inside' and 'outside' but obviously this is a complex issue. In the past the position of the Sister's Son was less ambiguous because the clans were endogamous. At this point in time the Sister's Son was more structurally fixed because he was always within the clan. 'Inside' and 'outside' were used with reference to the Big-House or the Belly, but not the clan. The role of the Sister's Son has become more complicated over the last few generations because the clans have started to intermarry (about 50% of clan marriages are exogamous now). Now there are two types of Sister's Son, those of the same clan, and those of a different clan. Sister's Sons from the same clan are in the same position as before. Sister's Sons from other clans are in a more ambivalent position; before they would have been categorically thought of as outsiders but now they are insiders and outsiders at the same time.

The creation of a new type of Sister's Son raised questions of procedure: could a Sister's Son from a different clan perform the robing ceremony? The basic answer to this was no. What tends to happen now is that an 'insider' (inside the clan) Sister's Son does the robing while the other 'outsider' (outside the clan) Sister's Sons look on respectfully. The 'outsider' Sister's Sons

honour the *panjaka* being 'raised up' by making the effort to attend, by witnessing his elevation, by placing themselves in a subservient position and by bringing tributary gifts, thereby introducing the idea of paying homage into the event [cf Middleton 1988:345-544 for a masterly elaboration of the role of Sister's Son among the *Karembola*]. The new scenario contains interesting twists; people who were previously classified as enemies actually assist in the ceremonies of their former foes. Clans pay homage to each other as 'outsider' Sister's Sons help 'raise up' *panjaka* from other clans. The implications of such a system should not be underestimated for even Earth-Shakers may be Sister's Sons. One day we went to visit *Iaban' i Tahody* (clan *Tevongo*), the most senior Earth-Shaker in the land and the unofficial *President Sahafatra*. He was away visiting we were told. The Family of his 'Male Mother' [*endrilahy*] (ie the family of his mother's brother) were 'raising up' their *panjaka* at *Fenoarivo* (clan *Antsoro*) and *Iaban' i Tahody* was attending in his role as 'outsider' Sister's Son. We were surprised that *Iaban' i Tahody* should pay homage to a *panjaka* from another clan. It forced us to recognise that even the theoretically highest ranked person in the land is in some situations an ordinary man with ordinary obligations. The Sister's Son set-up demonstrates how the authority of senior *panjaka* is relative and contextual rather than absolute.

Section 2: what makes a *panjaka* a *panjaka*?

In Section 1 I have described how *panjaka* are tested. In this section I will elaborate on the relationship between the *panjaka* and his subjects in order to show how testing both separates them and brings them together at the same time. The fact that *panjaka* and their subjects adopt opposing roles and positions in the struggle for power leads them to develop different characteristics and outlooks; however their mutual dependency makes inextricably part of the same system. A *panjaka* would be nothing without his subjects [a point of view shared exactly by the *Tanala* cf Beaujard 1983a:323]; it is his subjects that constitute him and who raise him up to his elevated position. He starts off the same as everyone else; informants explicitly state that all bodies, whether they be those of *panjaka* or ordinary people, are physically the same [*mitovy ny vata ny lelahy aby*]; there is no difference in constitution or blood [as opposed to the situation in South Sulawesi where nobles are said to have ‘white blood’ cf Errington 1989:23]. It is the glory given to him [*voninahitra omen’azy*] that makes the senior *panjaka* different [*mahapanjaka*]. The honour that constitutes him is likened to a flower emerging from the grass [*voninahitra*]. Greatness stems from common, humble ordinary stuff which the people make bloom.

Consequently *panjaka* are not allowed to be showy in the course of everyday life; there should be nothing to officially separate them out, no visual cues actually on the person to suggest any sort of special identity [cf Errington 1989:10 on invisible potency]. They are not allowed to wear signs of their position outside of ritual times; if they did they would be fined and shamed. The proud ones may cultivate many unofficial signs of status such as pristine black umbrellas, heavy trench coats and dark polished walking sticks/staves; they may wear a ‘*lamba*’ thrown over their shoulder and a felt trilby perched atop their shaven heads, but any man may do this. The fact is that authority is usually very low key; an Earth-Shaker might entertain visitors wearing just a woman’s cardigan, a felt hat and no underpants without feeling the slightest embarrassment. In ritual situations when a senior *panjaka* does wear his official garb he will compensate for his temerity and vanity by cultivating a special demeanour; he is easily identifiable as the silent, miserable figure in the corner, the overbearingly quiet and gloomy presence in the room.

The vital point is that senior *panjaka* are made, not born. What matters then is how one becomes a senior *panjaka* and how one then holds onto that position. As we have seen becoming and being a senior *panjaka* are aspects of the same process. Yet the raising-up of the *panjaka* does not mark his separation from the people. In fact his raising up connects him even more intimately with the people. The authority of the Earth-Shaker stems from his fulfilment of hard obligations towards his subjects, mostly involving giving valuable goods for communal consumption. If he manages to complete his dues people are frightened and in awe of his demonstrated power [*atahoran`olo ny panjaka*]; he has proved his point and is respected. Conversely a senior *panjaka* who fails to fulfil his duties is scorned, despised, ridiculed and mocked [*manebaka ny olo*]; as Middleton [Middleton 1988:142] expresses in a *Karembola* idiom - he has no way of 'freeing his shame' or 'upholding his honour' [*afak`henatse*]. An elected *panjaka* is always in a very precarious position because he can be removed as a result of this unmitigated shame.

A *panjaka* is one who rules or governs but what is important to understand is how he rules. The root of the word for ruling is 'zaka' and its precise meaning is very informative concerning the nature of ruling. In the Abinal/Malzac Dictionnaire Malgache-Francais it is literally translated as that "qu'on peut porter, supporter, gouverner; dont on est capable". This translation clearly conveys the related ideas of enduring and making something endure which are the ideas readily apparent in the land of *Sahafatra*. Examples from the Abinal/Malzac dictionary elucidate the point:

1. *tsy zakako entina ity entana ity* - je ne puis pas porter ce fardeau
2. *tsy zakako ny hafanana* - je ne puis pas supporter la chaleur
3. *tsy zakany ireo ankizy maditra ireo* - il ne peut pas gouverner ces enfants
obstines

The examples show the connection between ruling and enduring. The first two refer to not being able to ‘cope’ [*zaka*] with terrible heat or not being able to ‘manage’ [*zaka*] heavy luggage and are straightforward instances of ‘*zaka*’ basically meaning to endure. The third example, however, talking of someone unable to keep naughty children under control [*tsy zakany*] demonstrates how one must be able to endure something (the first meaning of ‘*zaka*’) in order to be able to master and rule it (the second, derivative meaning of ‘*zaka*’). It is these related meanings which are precisely the ones in operation in the land of *Sahafatra*.

The derivative meaning of ‘ruling’ stems from the primary meaning of ‘enduring’. Thus people in *Sahafatra* can use the word ‘*zaka*’ to talk about not being able to stand a certain medicine [*tsy zakako itiky aody itiky*] as well as to talk about how their leaders endure and rule. I would even argue that ‘*zaka*’ is used in a third way to describe how rulers make the polity endure. *Panjaka* are said to ‘make endure’ [*mahazaka*] if they live up to their responsibilities. The derivative logic continues another step: by enduring tests and trials one becomes a ruler but one also makes whatever one is ruling over endure too.

It is the dual, derivative meaning of ‘*zaka*’ that communicates what it is to rule. It is through suffering that a senior elected *panjaka* gives life to his followers. The heavy burden he must bear lightens the load of his subjects and makes the polity endure. The concept of ruling is intimately tied up with the idea of coping with an ongoing trial of strength. This is why senior *panjaka* are oft heard to complain that their load is ‘too heavy’ [*mavesatra loatra*]. The senior elected *panjaka* survives as long as he can overcome each trial, and bear the weight of his duties. When he no longer can he is said to be ‘worn out’ [*rebaka*], ‘old before his time’ [*mavozo*], and exhausted [*valaky*]. He is regarded as having been ‘used-up’ [*lany*] (cf Middleton 1988:8 for a similar *Karembola* concept of ‘tiredness’); having served his purpose he is thought to have come to the end of his useful life and is therefore discarded [*esorina/ ariana*]. Senior elected *panjakas* are subject to a terrible Catch 22: if they do their job properly they really suffer, they want to give up and their subjects won’t let them (“I beg leave to retire” [*mamatoky iaho*] the *panjaka* cry; “I’m sorry, that’s not possible” [*azafady!*] the subjects reply); if they enjoy being a senior *panjaka* then their duties are not being taken seriously enough and they will either be forced to suffer more or pressure will grow to have them removed.

I do not wish to create an overly cynical picture of the structure of authority. Although informants will often laugh about the mercenary criteria used to choose a senior *panjaka* that does not mean that they have no faith in the system of selection or their leader. If we consider what is going on then it is clear to see that cynicism and belief are not incompatible but are essentially two sides of the same coin. The *panjaka* is being asked to undergo a trial and the reaction he generates in his followers, cynicism or belief, depends on how his performance is judged by them. Belief blossoms from the satisfaction of the original cynical motives. The senior *panjaka* proves himself not on an arbitrary testing ground, but by the most painful and therefore valued means: the sacrifice of his own treasured cattle on behalf of his subjects.

The fact is that senior *panjaka* start out as ordinary people; they are then raised up to an extraordinary position; this is a root of weakness and dissent and the reason why people strictly enforce the testing. The rise of the senior *panjaka* from humble origins generates contrasting reactions in people. One reaction is to support the senior *panjaka* because he is acting on the behalf of all; supporting him makes him strong and turns him into a good and effective leader. The other reaction is to 'attack' him and try to bring him down [this is comparable to symbolic regicide controlling royal leaders cf de Heusch 1985:99]; why should an equal have the right to be above you? These two tendencies [cf Errington 1989:139-141 on centrifugal and centripetal forces] are not mutually exclusive; most people display both at some time, the dominant tendency depending on the occasion and context [cf Simonse 1992:191-213 for examples of antagonism between the king and his people in Sudan]. It is the combination of these two tendencies that is the key to understanding the career of a senior *panjaka*. No *panjaka* has a divine right to rule; all senior *panjaka* are constantly on trial. They need to prove themselves worthy of their position in order to be able to guarantee the support of the people.

Life careers and senior *panjaka* as targets

The age-grade system operational in the land of *Sahafatra* provides a natural and unquestioned model for personal growth. Everyone passes through the same stages like a set destiny. There is little or no reflection on why you are as you are, why you find yourself in the position you are

in today. In a system where the life course is already largely defined, the role of senior *panjaka* is a notable divergence since not everyone will become a great *panjaka*. Becoming a senior *panjaka* will differentiate between contemporaries who have until then been experiencing parallel lives. *Panjaka*-hood is the only career alternative that is sanctioned. However difference is regarded with suspicion and stringent controls are put on the position. It is as if everyone recognises that it is a difficult and dangerous game to play. To have a leader is essential but it is also abhorrent.

The artificial elevation of senior *panjaka* makes them a target for criticism and opportunistic attacks. Senior *panjaka* are thought of as ordinary men who have been made powerful by the people; consequently they are expected to live up to the impossibly heavy responsibilities allotted them. These consist of not only the official duties of the senior *panjaka* but also of the obligations of an ordinary man. As figures in the public eye, both resented and adored, *panjaka* have no chance to shirk or avoid any type of responsibility, official or unofficial. People are quick to pounce on any misdemeanour demanding the appropriate reparation. They take positive pleasure in trying to bring senior *panjaka* down. If a senior *panjaka* is under threat people will take advantage of the perceived weakness to weigh in with more criticisms and complaints. There is a sort of snowball effect as the senior *panjaka* comes under ever-increasing pressure.

One example of an Earth-Shaker under threat is that of *Tsaninena*, leader of the *Renifatsy* Belly of the *Masitafika* clan. He came under attack for refusing to give a cow for his ex-wife's funeral. Increasing pressure was put on him to comply: he was threatened with fines, with not being allowed to kill a cow when his new wife died, and with everybody abandoning his Big-House. His new wife even left him because she was so afraid and ashamed; however no-one felt guilty about using heavy handed tactics or about forcing a family split. There was no compassion but rather glee and excitement at the thought that an Earth-Shaker had been caught out in a 'wrong' [*diso*] and could be punished. There was anticipation of how he might 'fall' [*mety ho latsaka*]. By not complying the Earth-Shaker was taking a big risk for the sake of one cow. The psychology behind this stubborn behaviour was explained to me by *Tsaninena* himself: "If I give in and give a cow today" he said, "there will be no end to the demands" [*laha ekena, laha omeko aomby androany, tsy mety vita hataka*]. As far as he was concerned it was the thin end of the

wedge; if he caved in to his subjects his life would become a misery as they attempted to exploit his weakness to the full. Senior *panjaka* are expected to feed the people, literally as well as metaphorically; cows are extorted off them at every available opportunity with this aim in mind. This is why at some point senior *panjaka* have to learn to say 'no'. Being a senior *panjaka* is about surviving ones obligations; therefore one cannot give too much, too fast.

The ability to say 'no', and the perceived 'tightness' [*tia vola loatra*] of *Tsaninena* were oft repeated complaints. His unwillingness to give made him unpopular and we constantly heard murmurings, more and less subtle, that it was time he should go. However, his 'tightness' may also have saved him: by being careful with his resources he managed to avoid being 'used up' [*mahalany*] and discarded as someone with nothing left to give. *Tsaninena* did manage to survive the above cited incident by eventually compromising and agreeing to give a cow. However with a groundswell of opinion still against him it is another question how long he will survive. His case demonstrates how senior *panjaka* are ultimately playthings of the people. They are completely dispensable because there is no shortage of potential senior *panjaka*; they are not going to run out of candidates. It is as if the people want a senior *panjaka* (he has a traditional leader's role) but they cannot bear to have anyone above them. There is a constant tension between allegiance to a senior *panjaka* and a desire to see him fall. For it is only the actual removal of a senior *panjaka* that provides the proof of equality between men.

The idiom of fatherhood: the *panjaka* as 'Father of the People'

The tension between the *panjaka* and his subjects is mediated through the idiom of fatherhood: an Earth-Shaker is known by his subjects as the 'Father of the People' [*iaba ny olo aby*]. As has been described the people chant 'Father' [*iaba*] as the *panjaka* is being raised up. We must ask ourselves why the subjects should call their leaders 'father' when they are obviously not biological fathers to all of them, and consider the effect this might have on the relationship between subjects and *panjaka*? The terminology is interesting because even though it is literally inaccurate it is made to seem natural. As I analyse the idiom of fatherhood it will, however, become clear that the adoption of the title 'Father of the People' not only reinforces the authority

of senior *panjaka* but also undermines it: being cast as a father puts *panjaka* in an immediate position of authority, yet it also involves accepting massive obligations that *panjaka* cannot necessarily fulfil, and taking on the sometimes despotic overtones associated with father figures which encourages subjects to try to depose them.

Just because senior *panjaka* are often compared to and thought of as a father figures does not mean that we should assume therefore that the role of the *panjaka* is modelled on that of the Father. This would be a mistake as it is transparently not the case; fatherhood is simply a metaphor for the relationship between the *panjaka* and his subjects. The supposed father-son relationship is a satisfying metaphor for the relationship between a senior *panjaka* and his subjects because there is some correspondence and some dissonance. For example a *panjaka* is always a father (ie all *panjaka* I knew had children) but he is not literally father of all his subjects; similarly a *panjaka* has authority over his subjects as a father has over his sons, but the *panjaka*, unlike a father, can be removed from office.

We are able to know that the father-son relationship is a metaphor because father = *panjaka* is not a direct equation accepted by the people; the terms are not automatically substitutable for one another in all contexts. The people themselves know that the terms are not interchangeable and feel a need to explain why the father and *panjaka* are likened to each other. The metaphor is flexible enough to allow certain features of the *panjaka* to be exaggerated and others to be played down. The very fact that they recognise it as a metaphor is telling: in many respects a *panjaka* is felt to be a Father by his subjects and yet they know that he is not a Father and are not required to behave as if he was. To call a *panjaka* a Father is, therefore, to honour him and place him in a position of respect voluntarily. This is why it would be unseemly for a senior *panjaka* to actually, explicitly address his adult male subjects, his contemporaries, as children; that would be presuming too much and might hasten his downfall. He can be father of the people in a general abstract sense but individual subjects (age mates in particular) should not be treated as children.

In a sense, then, to compare the *panjaka* to a Father is disguising what is actually going on. A Father is a permanent fixture after all, by right of being a genitor, whereas a senior *panjaka* is a

temporary incumbent. The senior *panjaka* is not the biological father (or even the husband of the mother) of all his subjects. The fact that he is not a 'real' Father to all his subjects but that he is still thought of as one opens up the realm of the counter-intuitive, defining a spiritual sphere through negatives. If a *panjaka* can be a Father to all the people without really being the Father of each individual subject what else is possible? A counter-intuitive world is created thereby generating further speculation. To call someone a Father who is not your biological Father is to recognise their seniority. However since you know that they are not your real Father you are aware that their seniority must be derived from a different source. What the metaphor of fatherhood demonstrates is that people recognise that there is a source of fertility/blessing outside of that based on descent. It is access to this undefined alternative source of fertility/blessing that makes the Earth-Shaker merit the title 'Father of the People'. He is providing something that the people need and this makes him a father.

Father-Son tension: another reason why senior *panjaka* are targets

The fact that *panjaka* are and are not 'real' biological fathers to all their subjects further complicates and aggravates their relationship with the people. How do you treat someone who is not your real father but who is classified as one ²⁸? I intend to show that the relationship between real fathers and sons has an impact on how people treat *panjaka*.

The relationship between Father and Son is not always straightforward and trouble-free [cf Fortes 1959: Oedipus and Job in West African Religion]. Fathers can be overbearing figures ²⁹ and sons don't always obey or please their fathers. Both sides dress up and disguise the tension inherent in their relationship through etiquette ³⁰. Sons are thus able to remonstrate with their fathers as long as they still follow the proper rules of decorum. In the final instance, however, a disagreement can never be allowed to run out of control. A son should run away rather than allow an argument to boil over, thereby avoiding the risk of shaming his family by behaving improperly and without due respect for his father.

The irreversibility of their relationship can lead to a degree of fear and frustration, on the son's

part, promoting a desire to be free from obligation. Young men tire of endlessly expressing gratitude to their fathers and make moves to break away and become independent. They leave to set up their own homesteads, fuelling the motor that generates the whole *panjaka* system by trying to make it on their own³¹. The frustration of a real Father-Son relationship explains in part the tension between a senior *panjaka* and his subjects. In a Father-Son relationship dissent is ultimately not possible; a son must always bow to his father's wishes. In the Senior *Panjaka*-Subject relationship, on the other hand, although dissent may be difficult it is accepted as an essential part of the system. Senior *panjaka* are chosen by their subjects and only remain in office on their say so.

The parallel nature of the two sets of relations allows emotions generated in one type of relationship to be satisfyingly mapped on to the other. The pressure resulting from the given nature of Father-Son relations is thus expressed not only in practical terms by physically breaking away, but also in emotional terms by venting frustration on the closest equivalent (but not identical) relationship: Senior *Panjaka*-Subject. There is a major and satisfying role-reversal here: instead of sons presenting mainly one directional tribute to their fathers, they demand tribute from a sort of substitute super-father (the senior *panjaka*). In his role of ritual super-father to the people the senior *panjaka* acts as a punch bag on which his subjects can take out the frustrations they feel towards their real fathers. This substitution allows tensions to be played out while maintaining "kinship amity" [cf Fortes 1959:54] and the sacred parent-child relationship

³².

Section 3: of *panjaka* and politicians - a reversal of fortunes

How ideas about ‘testing’ translate into wider political life

In this section I want to talk about how the practise of ‘testing’ *panjaka* has consequences reaching far outside of the traditional political system. I will show how the idea of ‘testing’ leaders is applied to politicians in the wider national arena as well as in the local region. I will show how traditional ideas inform people’s conceptions of how national politicians ought to, but do not, behave. The aim of the section is to illustrate how culturally pervasive the idea of testing is, and to graphically demonstrate what people hope to gain by ‘testing’ their leaders. The data is based on informants reactions to two elections that occurred during my stay: the first a Mayoral Election for *Vondrozo*, and the second a Presidential Election for the whole of Madagascar.

The disjunction between urban and rural conceptions of power

To be a *panjaka* is to be someone who rules, but what it is to rule is understood very differently at the centre and the periphery of Madagascar. The fact that national politicians and countryfolk have a opposed conceptions of what constitutes power means that at best they are talking past each other and at worst one party is being manipulated and misled by the other. The confusion of the situation is heightened by the fact that the process for choosing representative heads (be they professional politicians or local ‘chiefs’ [*panjaka*]) is, at least on the surface, very similar. Both adopt an electoral system whereby a body of people, theoretical equals in principle and potential subjects of a future leader in practice, select a candidate to be raised up into a position of power, after having had a prolonged discussion followed by a vote.

Loosely speaking both operate what they think of as a democratic system; they both talk of ‘choosing’. Of course many disparities can be found: the scale, the difference between a secret ballot and an agreement by public consensus, the right of women to participate fully in one system and not in the other etc. What matters however is that people believe the systems to both be of one kind and judge them accordingly. Discrepancies between the two systems are

disturbing to the local actor who wonders why systems that are so essentially the same should work out so differently. As we have seen in the countryside the authority of the *panjaka* stems from his fulfilment of hard obligations towards his subjects, mostly involving giving valuable goods for communal consumption. It is thought that politics should operate the same way at the national level and that the President of the Republic should be like a super-*panjaka*. National politicians are aware of this and plan their campaigns accordingly, giving the impression that they are following rural codes of practice, in order to win votes in the countryside.

Politics of the people: infinite bounty v limited goods theory

The average *Sahafatra* peasant is a sort of specialised cargo cultist. There is the idea that the land, and therefore the world in general, contains infinite bounty: the earth is said to be endlessly fertile; the hills are supposed to be loaded with precious stones; the shops are full of goods that are thought to never run out etc. The problem is of course to access this infinite wealth. He does not build runways, embrace the Bible or host ghost dances in the hope of a mammoth 'arrivage' of goods. Instead he is forever on the look-out for the ideal leader to solve his problems. He thinks the goods are already there and that if the right person is brought to power things will automatically right themselves; rice, salt, cooking oil, petrol and soap will all become cheaply available. It is assumed that since the essentials of life are already there all that remains to be done is for a satisfactory distribution to be made. The local model, according to which *panjaka* are meant to share their massive wealth with their subjects, is applied to the national level.

The fact is that peoples expectations are always disappointed; as far as they are concerned there is never a satisfactory distribution. Everything still seems to remain scarce and expensive. The recognition of this state of affairs does not, however, undermine the general belief in the 'Infinite Bounty Theory'; what happens instead is that a 'Limited Goods Theory' operates in tandem with it. There should be endless wealth but there isn't; this is not due to a flaw in the concept but due to the fact that the people are cheated out of their share which their political leaders have failed to give them. Embittered, but rapidly adapting to the actual situation they find themselves in, the people compete for and fight over the limited goods that are in circulation.

A new leader may enjoy a period of grace of several months before this type of discontent begins to set in. Then people start to lose patience; they feel confused, disappointed in their leader and disappointed in themselves. A leader should be a source of riches which it is the peoples right and duty to forcefully appropriate. If the riches are not immediately forthcoming the people wistfully recognise failure on their own part, for it is less the responsibility of the *panjaka* to give than the responsibility of the people to force him to give. The populace should be a check on the excesses of the *panjaka* and if they do not bring him under control it is their own fault. This makes corruption more of a practical than a moral issue; the man who gets away with it is a man to be admired and feared rather than despised. Corruption is interpreted more as a redistribution than as theft; the problem arises when the anticipated equalisation process is put into reverse, with the money being channelled in the wrong direction. Instead of reaching the people 'the money visits the pocket of its handler' [*vola ienga an i paosy*].

Honesty is not rated as a political virtue; people are not surprised or shocked to hear about the number of villas abroad or of the wealth stashed in foreign bank accounts by ex-Presidents. This is a sign of competence and know-how as far as they are concerned; it is the way they expect politicians to behave. The popularly expressed regret stems not from the chosen leader's fiscal improprieties, but from the non-application of this assumed competence and from the unwillingness of the leader to use his ill-gotten gains to address the problems of his subjects.

Declarations of wealth

Conventional wisdom has it that in politics you bribe the electorate in order to buy their votes; then once in a position of power you recoup your losses by profiting from it. To check this abuse one must declare all one's property, land, family holdings, business interests, bank accounts etc before standing for office. In theory this prevents the office-holder from taking advantage of his influential position. This procedure is followed for Mayoral elections in rural Madagascar but it is interpreted in rather a different way. A novice, green politician assumes that when he donates gifts (rice, footballs, free concerts, building materials) while campaigning he is buying votes. He thinks he is paying to get into power while the electorate think he is demonstrating,

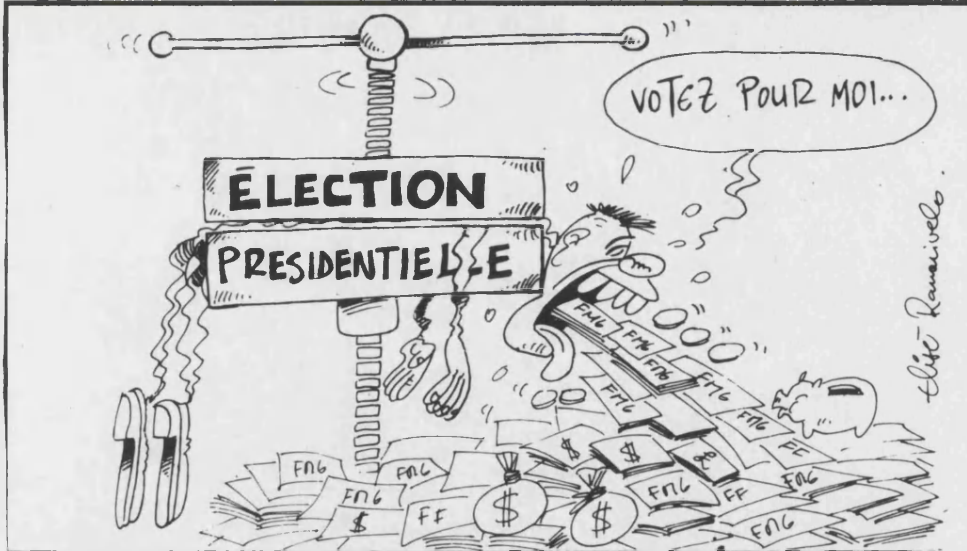
and giving a taste of, the wealth that will be available to them when he is in power. The Declaration of Wealth, designed in theory to put a brake on future abuses by the candidates, is in practice interpreted by the people as a promise of further riches. The view of the naive politician and the people are simply not the same.

At the national level this discordance does not pose any problems for the politicians; those that are experienced and cynical enough can manipulate the voters by playing up to their expectations and hopes in the sure knowledge that once elected they will be safely out of reach. Propaganda (popularly known as '*propa vandy*' which means 'lies') for the Presidential Election was more concerned with demonstrating wealth and power than about formulating and disseminating policy. All the talk during the presidential campaign was about how many tonnes of rice and how many millions [*tapitrisa*] of Francs Malgaches have been donated to each town by the different political leaders. How many planes, helicopters and cars did they have at their disposal (one campaign poster simply said: "*Voninahitsy Eugene* has a helicopter. Vote for *Voninahitsy!*"); how many towns could they cover in their whistle stop tours; what was the overall budget of their campaign; what rich foreign powers had they got supporting them (the more the better which perhaps explains why *Ratsiraka* supporters said his Antonov plane, given by the Russians years ago, was actually given by the CIA); how many posters had they had printed; how many leaflets, plastic bags and T-shirts emblazoned with their pictures could they afford to drop from the skies. The candidates are thought of as already successful, and wealthy business people; potential patrons to be exploited. Obesity is not a problem for the image-makers here, rather it is a sign of health and prosperity, a positive feature to be played up. The popular press is obsessed with treating the major candidates as literal 'heavyweights' [*poids lourds*]. The more sophisticated media wants to know the contenders actual weight in kg, what their favourite aftershave is, who is their preferred hairdresser and couturier etc

But for local elections it is not so straightforward. The Mayor of a small town is not removed enough to ignore the demands of the populace; like a *panjaka* he is obliged towards them. The new Mayor of *Vondrozo*, a half Chinese, half Malagasy man called *Blid* who was elected in spite of his skinniness, was surprised by the demands made on him; the amount of times he was asked to lend or give his possessions. If *Vondrozo* was fined in a dispute over cattle it is he who had

EXPRES

par Elisè Ranarivelo



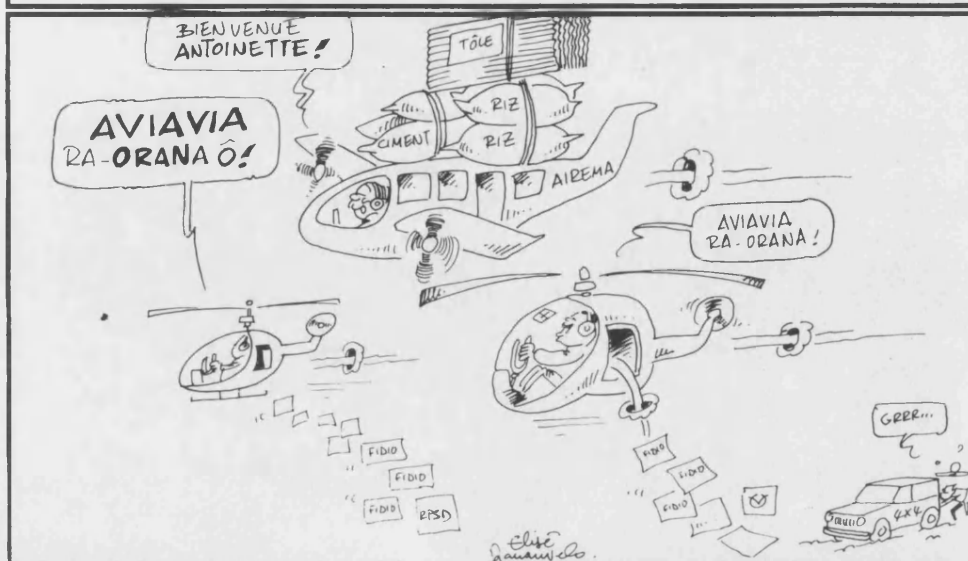
EXPRES

par Elisè Ranarivelo



EXPRES

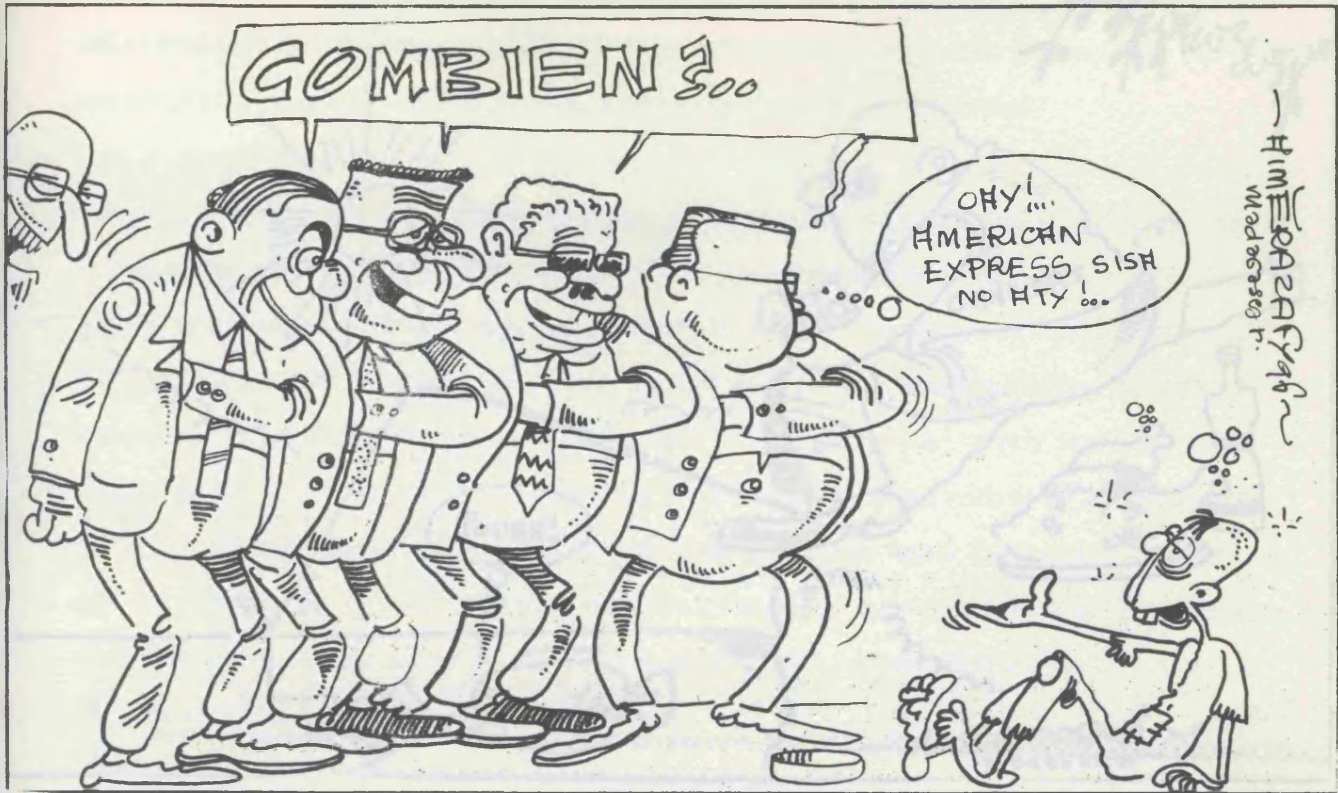
par Elisè Ranarivelo



Politicians give away and demonstrate wealth

SANS CIBLE

Par : Aimé Razafy



SANS CIBLE

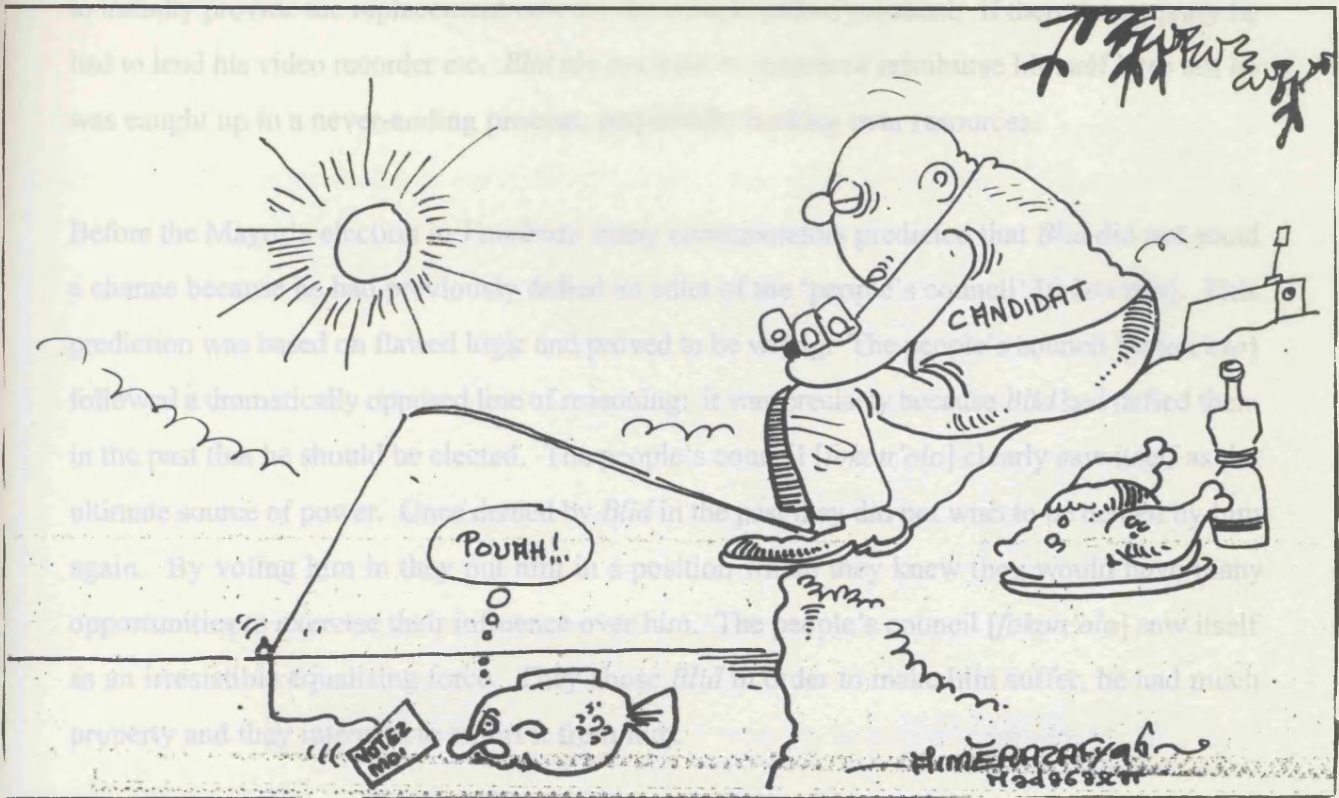
Par : Aimé Razafy



Unscrupulous politicians handle the public

SANS CIBLE

Par : Aimé Razafy



SANS CIBLE

Par : Aimé Razafy



Politicians taking voters for fools

to initially provide the replacement cow for the compensation payment; if there was a party he had to lend his video recorder etc. *Blid* always tried to somehow reimburse himself later but he was caught up in a never-ending process, perpetually battling over resources.

Before the Mayor's election in *Vondrozo* many commentators predicted that *Blid* did not stand a chance because he had previously defied an edict of the 'people's council' [*fokon'olo*]. This prediction was based on flawed logic and proved to be wrong. The people's council [*fokon'olo*] followed a dramatically opposed line of reasoning: it was precisely because *Blid* had defied them in the past that he should be elected. The people's council [*fokon'olo*] clearly saw itself as the ultimate source of power. Once denied by *Blid* in the past they did not wish to be denied by him again. By voting him in they put him in a position where they knew they would have many opportunities to exercise their influence over him. The people's council [*fokon'olo*] saw itself as an irresistible equalising force. They chose *Blid* in order to make him suffer; he had much property and they intended to extort it from him.

Authority, identity and responsibility

The West has an ideology of the individual as a bounded entity; this is an assertion, a strategy designed to promote an idea of personal responsibility and the possibility of self-evaluation; it is not necessarily an accurate model of what we experience (consider the fact that we utilise the idiom of shared blood, that we accept that character is partly moulded by one's family and that genes are inherited; consider the difficulty we have of separating someone from the clothes they wear, the books they read, the house they live in, the views they hold, the aesthetics they appreciate; consider how we know when we marry someone we are not taking on an individual but a whole package of family, friends and past history). The ideology is a search for meaning and significance. By adopting a tactic that defines and separates we single one another out from the mass. Instead of accepting the inevitability of ties to others we stress individual autonomy. This leads to a system where we measure ourselves against each other; we use an abstract set of scales, we appeal to an ethereal morality.

In *Sahafatra* the 'unbreakability' of ties is stressed; everyone is involved in a totality from which they cannot escape. The individual is an anti-social force and should not be encouraged to express himself after childhood. Being an individual is something you should do elsewhere; as distance from home increases the more one is permitted to be an individual. Those who wage labour in far flung corners of the island [*mamanga*] can reap the rewards of their labour, can own property as individuals and can have out of the ordinary things happen to them! They are in uncharted territory, and their way is not mapped out for them. No authority means no responsibility; out of the social arena they are non-persons, free-agents who have in effect fallen off the edge of the world. Back home the opposite is true; their place in the community is decided for them, ties to their fellows in the group must be manifestly demonstrated all day every day [cf Fortes 1987]. No appeals are made to an abstract morality; participation is demanded by ones contemporaries, commanded by ones elders. Authority and responsibility are immanent in the group. As authority increases, individual identity decreases. The more authority you gain the more you are lost yourself, accountable and answerable to the members of the Fertile [*lonaky*].

Authority, identity and responsibility are inseparable ideas. As one exercises increasing amounts of authority ones personal identity diminishes and ones personal responsibility increases. Fame is gained at the cost of individuality. A *panjaka* is a creation of the public will and is constantly reminded of the fact. The *panjaka* is representative of the whole body politic but he is also consumed by it; he is both exalted and humbled at the same time. His crowd of subjects are likened to water: powerful, capricious and unformed. They need to be moulded and controlled but their dynamism and vitality is unstoppable; they engulf the *panjaka* and threaten to wash him away; he must struggle just to survive.

A *panjaka* is a great person and a nobody. He more than anyone is subject to the tyranny of a mapped out life and must bow before his fateful lot. Only in death is his individual identity reinstated; briefly he is remembered as a great man but also as a father or a relative; acts of courage and kindness are recounted; the individual is recreated in a hole in time. Then the depersonalising process takes over once more as the *panjaka* is wrapped up in the universal

grammar of death. Soon he will be forgotten, metamorphosed into an anonymous object. He will become a monument and a reminder of a way of life, an enduring ethic.

The problem is that at the national level of politics there are no such controls. The ultimate power of the island is out of reach and can defy all the dictates of custom, disappointing his invisible, removed subjects. He is at once all powerful and unaccountable.

Endnotes

1. Cattle trading was often carried out by individuals slightly disillusioned by traditional ways. A man we knew was so saddened by the inexplicable loss of two young wives to illness that he turned to cattle trading, in a sense opting out of village life. He was easily spotted because of the untypical all-denim outfit he sported; however he was a hard man to track down because most of his time was spent on the move with cattle in tow, or in *Farafangana* spending his profits and brokering new deals.

2. One popular story describes how it came to be that cows were substituted for people: "Long ago, when someone died, people placed the stem of a banana plant under the corpse to act as a cushion in the tomb. But the people became proud and, wanting to show that they were different to animals, decided to place the body of another person, a sacrificed slave, under the corpse instead of the banana plant. Eventually people began to worry that they might run out of people, so, arguing that a cow and a slave were the same, they decided to sacrifice a cow instead" [*Ny olo taloha rehefa misy maty da ny vata akondro no atao ondana. Nefa miavo ny olo; tsara kokoa laha masy olo mitovy aminy no atao ondana. Nieritreritra ny olo fa mety ho tapitra ny olo, lany taranaka, da miteny izy ozy -fa ny aomby mitovy aminy andevo no vonoina rehefa misy maty*].

3. Their strength and vigour is demonstrated before they are sacrificed when young men risk serious injury in order to tease and taunt them, tweaking their genitals and riding on their horns, before wrestling them to the ground [*mitolona*]. A cow that puts up a fight is admired for its spirit [*masiaka ny aomby!*]. At a funeral, unlike at other sacrifices, the cow is left alone before it is killed.

4. Cows are said to be the same as human beings [*mitovy amin'olo*]; as for humans great attention is paid to the details of a cow's anatomy. People and cows share terminology for many of their body parts such as the head [*loha*], ears [*sofiny*], chest [*tratra*], belly [*troky*], nose [*orona*], eyes [*maso*], teeth [*nify*], jaw [*vaza*], rear [*vody*], forehead [*panda*]; they are even attributed hands [*tana*] and feet [*tomboky*] instead of legs or paws which animals are normally said to have. Cows are also like humans because both trample things [*manosy*]; women trample the rice to loosen the grain from the stalks and cattle and young men trample the paddy to combine the earth and water to make it ready for planting. When the work is finished both humans and cows must be thoroughly washed [*mampandro ny aomby ny olo*] because otherwise the cow, like a neglected and mistreated person, will sulk and get thinner, instead of eating with a healthy appetite as it would if it was clean and happy [*mampahia laha maloto fa sorena ny aomby; madio, mazoto misakafo*].

5. An apocryphal story makes this connection clear. The story tells of a father and his naive son. Each time the father finds a wife for the son the son messes up the relationship because he does not know about sex, and the woman leaves. Even when the father explains what to do the son fails, simply lying on top of his wife and doing nothing. The father, who is in despair, comes up with a master plan. When his son is lying on top of his next wife he pours some rice over his bum and lets a chicken feed on the grains. As the chicken pecks at the rice, the son thrusts away to avoid the pain; soon he gets the right idea and the couple have many children and live happily ever after...

6. We were witness to very violent family debates about whether a cow needed to be given for a particular ceremony or atonement and about where it would come from, and who would give it if it was. We were often shocked by the viciousness with which people argued especially over cases of imputed incest. However when we met up with the same people the day after and commented on what a big fight it had been they would look at us blankly as if to say 'What fight?'. On reflection the fighting aspect seemed to consist, in large part, of game-playing; without the 'fight' the outcome would have had no significance and the import of the offering of a cow would have been diminished.

7. According to Feierman when the new king was announced the subjects were allowed, once, to make their demands clear. They shouted: "Give us rain. Give us bananas. Give us sugar cane. Give us plantains. Give us meat. Give us food. You are our king, but if you do not feed us properly we will get rid of you. The country is yours; the people must have their stomachs filled. Give us rain. Give us food...." [Feierman 1996:46].

8. A *panjaka* who gives up his 'crown' returns to being an ordinary man and retains no special privileges to separate him out from his contemporaries. However, if he has been a good *panjaka* this will be remembered and he may be posthumously honoured at his death by having his body temporarily laid out in a house 'behind' [*ambadika*] the Big-House (which is standard funeral procedure for current *panjaka*), rather than in the Big-House like ordinary commoners, before final burial in the tomb. Women may show their respect for an ex-*panjaka* by stifling their grief at the wake, which again parallels the appropriate behaviour expected at the funeral of a real *panjaka*. The full show of respect is reserved for *panjaka* who die while in office because these men have literally sacrificed their lives.

9. It is interesting to note that the 'choosing' of a *panjaka* is all part and parcel of his 'capture'. The word for 'chosen' [*fidina*] is interestingly loaded in this context. As in English to be 'chosen' normally has positive connotations. To cast the process of selecting a *panjaka* as 'choosing' presents it as a privilege, masking the negative side. What is good for the 'choosers' is not necessarily good for the 'chosen' one, since the 'choosers' simply look for the juiciest picking to consume. The euphemistic terminology hides what is really going on. Primo Levi notes the same thing with reference to the concentration camps of World War II; the process of deciding who would go to the gas chamber was known as 'selections'.

10. The conch shell is associated with royalty and royal ceremonies. Conch shells come from the west coast and are bought at great expense from travelling salesmen. Every Big-House/Fertile must have a one hung up on the wall. The shells are brought down to be used at circumcision ceremonies, the 'raising up' of *panjaka*, and commemorations of the dead. They are also used in order to raise the alarm in times of danger, for instance when there is a cattle theft in progress. The conch shell may never be blown without good reason as this is regarded as 'crying wolf'. If the shell is blown in the middle of the night everyone must muster in order to help overcome whatever emergency has arisen. Anyone who does not respond to the call will be fined.

11. One of these lineages, the *Zafitarosy*, is actually barred not for bad-behavior but because they are the ritual elder-brother [*zokin-olo*] of the *Antemahavelo* Belly [*troky*]. They are considered to be advisers and are assigned the duty of selecting prospective candidates from the eligible lineages. They nominate someone who gains the position of Earth-Shaker as long as he is generally regarded as acceptable.

12. The 'raising up' of the wife, known as the '*aka-bady*' makes the marriage official, and is paralleled with the 'raising up' of the *panjaka* [*sandratra panjaka*].

13. If there is a marital dispute it is always the husband's family that must provide the cow needed to encourage a reconciliation. Likewise it is the husband's family who must give a cow to the wife if they want to have rights over and above her to the children.

14. *Rehefa panjaka no manolotra toaka na vola da panjaka koa no mamaly ny resaka; raha mason-drano no manome toaka na vola da mason-drano koa no mamaly ny roho.*

15. Informants drew pictures of what the '*soto-mena*' used to look like in the past. From their descriptions it appears that the '*soto-mena*' was a long floppy conical red hat with a bobble at the end, much like a nightcap that Santa Claus might wear.

16. The '*soto-mena*' is used to mark people out and distinguish them from others in some way. This is demonstrated by the fact that when the '*soto-mena*' is used in the circumcision ceremony [*fora*] for male children (the only time the cloth is used in a ceremony not specifically related to *panjaka*) it serves the same purpose. At this event, after the children have been circumcised, they are dressed in a '*soto-mena*' (and a specially tied wrap normally worn by women known as a '*salova*') before being ritually seated three times on a sacrificial cow's forehead [*pandan'aomby*]. The '*soto-mena*' makes visible the change in status as a relatively ungendered boy becomes a member of the exclusive society of men. In the same way as the '*soto-mena*' singles out men from boys (and women) at circumcisions, it singles out *panjaka* from ordinary men later on in life.

17. He is paid a payment of 100 *Ariary* [500 Francs Malgaches] for the performance of this duty.

18. The Old Woman is only red to give the same number of cattle as Earth-Shakers; however as the most senior and apical head he will have to sponsor more communal clan feasts than anyone else.

19. Things started during '*volambitabe*' are thought to be fruitful and to 'end well' [vita be]; they are also said to be blessed [from the Malagasy '*mitahy*' which means to bless]. The month to be avoided is April [*fosa*] which is thought of as the opposite of '*volambitabe*' and which is very inauspicious.

20. I have always wondered whether this word for greeting is a hybrid of French and Malagasy: '*manao ca va*' [to do ca va] transformed to '*manotsafa*'.

21. Minders of the One House of some clans may not wear the '*soto-mena*' at this point, it being a privilege reserved for Earth-Shakers.

22. The type of cloth depends on the seniority of the *panjaka*. Earth-Shakers wear very fine, multi-coloured, striped, well finished and tough silk cloth known as 'red cloaks' [*lamba mena*], 'great cloaks' [*lamba be*] and 'cow cloths' [*lamban'aomby*]. More junior *panjaka* wear cloth which is less decorated, thinner and unfinished, with untied ends [*tsy fatorana ny kofehy*] known as 'broken silk' [*vaky landy/sarimbo landy*].

23. The identical practice of the *Tanala* is interpreted by Beaujard as symbolizing the taking possession of the three worlds that go to make up the universe [cf Beaujard 1983a:314]. There is no such conception expressed by the people of *Sahafatra*.

24. Minders of the One House of some clans may not perambulate, this being a privilege reserved for Earth-Shakers.

25. This may be because the only thing that is said to makes cows different from men is that cows cannot talk.

26. *Zanahary atsinana, Zanahary avaratra, Zanahary atsimo, Zanahary ankandrefa, any ao tany masy laha teo ange. Angeha anao aty hira namboaranay; anao namboatra tana, namboatra tomboky amin'ny olom-belo etoa. Itoa lonaky nahatsanganay, nahatsanga ny tany, nahatsanga ny olo amin'ny asa, ho soa, ho tsara! Avy atsinana, ankandrefa, atsimo, avaratra, izay nangeha Zanahary. Ato koa ny Masitafika: Ramahafasa, Rasoza, Andrambaharoy, Tebiso, Renifatsy, Andrahamoky. Navory etoa troki-olo isak mana-tany. Manome aomby, hahalany aomby atsika, tsy manahy na tamana na vositra lelahy. Zanahary, mienga avaratra, mienga atsimo, mandehana, mandeha koa atsinana, ankandrefa, am-be vava-rano. Te-inominao ity aomby ity, ity toaka ity. Da izany io.*

27. The inside/outside distinction is not however the only consideration. For the *Masitafika* clan it is customary for the Earth-Shaker of each Belly to be crowned by a Sister's Son (real or classificatory) from a higher ranked Belly; the most senior ranked Belly is crowned by the second ranking Belly because there is no-one higher. Thus if the *Renifatsy* are being raised up the *Andrahamoky* crown them; if the *Andrahamoky* are being raised up then the *Andrambaharoy* crown them; if the *Andrambaharoy* are raised up then the *Andrahamoky* crown them. Bottom ranked crown middle ranked, while first and second share reciprocal duties. It is as if one should be crowned by a senior whenever possible; failing that by the highest ranking person available.

28. It could be argued that the Malagasy world is full of fathers who are not really fathers. However this is only the case when 'father' is being used as a temporary and relative term. The case we have here is one in which the Earth-Shaker is structurally fixed as 'Father of the People'.

29. For elaborations on the problems inherent in the father-son relationship in essentially patrilineal societies see Fortes [1959: 26-33] on the Tallensi.

30. For the Tallensi the tension is reduced through ritual avoidance between a father and his first-born son [cf Fortes 1959:27].

31. This simply distances them from the obligations and strains of filial piety but cannot negate them. In systems where ancestors play a vital role in the lives of the living the father-son bond can never ultimately be denied [cf Fortes 1959:32-33].

32. The Tallensi have no such outlet and must constantly maintain filial piety even after death: "The supreme act of filial piety owed by sons is the performance of the mortuary and funeral ceremonies for the parents" [Fortes 1959: 29]. "Ancestor worship presupposes the triumph of parenthood. It recognizes the paramountcy of the moral norms emanating from society as a whole over the dangerous egotism of childhood" [Fortes 1959:81].

Chapter 5

The potency of the *panjaka*

The testing of the *panjaka* is not merely an equalisation process designed to bring down or punish the *panjaka*. Quite to the contrary it also serves to make the *panjaka* a potent and effective leader. Having discussed the burdens of authority in the previous chapter, it is important now to show that the *panjaka* is a potent figure, infused with the power of the people [cf Errington 1989 for alternative idioms of potency]. It is the intention of this chapter to show that the notion of power is inextricably linked with the figure of the *panjaka*. He must be potent to start with (this is a major criterion for choosing him) but once in office he becomes super-potent by appropriating the power of his subjects. Section 1 will outline some of the different senses in which a *panjaka* is thought to be potent and will demonstrate the connection between these areas of potency and the actual privileges afforded to the *panjaka* by his subjects; Section 2 will provide a graphic illustration of a scenario where the impotence of the *panjaka* has led to the creation of a new system of devolved power.

Section 1: how *panjaka* are potent

The popular ‘myth’ of how people became *panjaka*

When I asked about how people became senior *panjaka* in the past I was normally given an answer concerning military prowess. In theory a person became a *panjaka* by fighting with the bandits/enemies [*fahavalo*] and winning. A man was required to enter into combat with the brigands holding a spear [*lefo*]. If he emerged victorious at the end of the conflict still holding his weapon in his hand then he would become a *panjaka* [*laha resy fahavalo rehefa vita ady, laha mbola mitana lefo izy, da panjaka*]. This story is frequently told but clearly the whole notion of power has now diversified. In the past personal potency, demonstrated in battle, was the root of being a *panjaka* but now the clans are no longer at war with one another and, consequently, the idiom of power has changed.

The popular myth has become a metaphor for expressing the continued belief that the *panjaka* is a powerful figure. However, power now comes in a number of guises. The fact that many of the most senior *panjaka* are old and frail illustrates this point; their power is clearly not of the obvious physical kind and yet they are still perceived to be potent. Power now derives from a variety of sources: ability to attract supporters, economic wealth (measured in cattle and rice), perceived wisdom and fairness, and the capacity to make the land fertile. In this section I intend to clarify the relationship between age and potency before proceeding to outline the current ways of demonstrating power/potency. I will end the section by showing how potency and privilege are interconnected.

Age and potency

The connection between age and potency is not a straightforward one. This is because potency is measured as a combination of different qualities and achievements. Thus age and potency are not directly related: while some contributing factors to the net potency of a man tend to increase with age others may decrease. Put most clearly there is a refinement in the type of potency demonstrated as one ascends the authority hierarchy. At base Fathers are straightforward

providers; more senior men are providers in a less literal and more ritual sense. The type of prowess required changes, mere physical power diminishing in importance the higher you get.

This argument is supported by the actual state of affairs on the ground: Earth-Shakers are, on average, significantly older than Minders of the One House who in turn are older, on average, than Fathers. There is a proviso to this assertion of the diminishing importance of physical strength and that is that senior *panjaka* must still farm. If he is unable to do that he is regarded as unfit for office. Farming demonstrates continuing vitality and an essential, unseverable connection with the land/earth. This is why old Earth-Shakers still go out to the fields even if they are not much use when they get there: their presence in the rice-paddies allows people to think that they are still actively involved in the agricultural process. Subjects assist in this charade by covering up for their senior *panjaka*. Often, when we were searching for the Earth-Shaker and found that he was not in people would euphemistically say that he was in the fields [*any an 'tonda*] giving the impression that he was working when they knew perfectly well that he was most likely snoozing in the shade of a mango tree while his relatives did the real labouring.

Maturation: from child to warrior to father...

The role of the *panjaka* is tied up with the idea of their potency. As has been noted this potency is of two types: the potency inherent in the man and the potency infused in him by his subjects. To understand potency it is necessary to look at the relationship between potency and the general life-cycle, before investigating the special type of potency of the *panjaka*.

At a very young age boys are regarded as too weak and too unsocialized to be *panjaka*; they are still thought of as 'soft' [*malemy*] children, unable to control their emotions and unable to think about the consequences of their behaviour. They are described as little animals [*biby kely*] and as 'overgrown babies still suckling on mother's milk' [*be minono*]. As they get older they turn from anti-social individualistic children into more social beings. They organise themselves into co-operative work groups known as the 'many children' [*zaza-marō*] and channel their energy

into communal tasks, such as clearing the fields, on the understanding that their seniors will reward them at festival time by supplying them with food and drink for a party. Some become herd-boys and spend their time wandering the hills, tending for their family's cattle.

As the adolescents grow up and fill out they become recognised as warriors [*panabaka*] ¹. The warrior age-grade is essentially made up of unmarried (or recently married) young men who have by this stage developed tremendous strength and vitality but who are regarded as too wild and uncontrollable to take up any official positions in the wider society [cf Bloch 1992b:133-135 for a direct *Zafimaniry* equivalent]. Their wildness is expressed by their 'anti-social' behaviour and by the particularly flamboyant way in which they dress. Warriors [*panabaka*] are highly visible: they grow their hair, tease it out afro-style (in contrast to the closely cropped elders) and wedge brightly coloured combs in it; on top of this big-hair they precariously perch little pork-pie hats or felt trilbies decorated with drawing pins arranged in geometrical patterns; they wear incredibly tight shorts with frayed tassels, big garish belts, bright miniature short sleeved shirts with coloured epaulettes that they are literally bursting out of, and fluorescent-dyed jelly-bean style plastic sandals.

On top of this display they behave outrageously; they are always looking for a drink, a woman ² and a fight. They hang out together away from the authority of their parents, practising their boxing [*moraingy*] ³ and visiting events in far-away villages. They are 'educated' in the art of power and ruling by being encouraged to operate their own authority system for their age-grade. Indeed one of the ad hoc explanations given for their name is that they are people who have a 'Bac' [*pana + bac = panabaka*] (from the French academic qualification: Baccalaureat) ⁴.

They elect their own *panjaka* who is known as the Chief of the Warriors ⁵ [*panjakan'panabaka*] and who has his own special realm of authority [*mana didy abo koa*]: organising certain 'dirty work' [*asa maloto*] at funerals (in particular the carrying of bodies to the tomb), going on special missions as a messenger [*iraka*], co-ordinating the carrying out of urgent agricultural tasks or house-building work etc. The Chief of the Warriors [*panjakan'panabaka*] is 'raised up' in a special ceremony essentially the same as the adult version. The major differences are: that he is only allowed to wear a white 'soto' [*soto-fotsy*] instead of a red one; that the ceremony is carried



The *Masitafika* Chief of the Warriors entertains

out in an ordinary house not a Fertile [*tsy azo anaty lonaky*]; and that although a cow is sacrificed a blessing cannot be called for [*tsy mety mitata*] ⁶.

This event is entirely organised and exclusively attended by the young Warriors and their female age-grade counterparts. The older generations stay out of the way in the Fertile and let matters take their own course. In this way the Warrior [*panabaka*] age-grade is encouraged to create its own micro-cosmos, a separate society existing, to an extent, outside of the wider grouping. The Warriors [*panabaka*] have a critical role to play in *Sahafatra* society; there are after all some types of work that only they can do. However their activities are also ‘schooling’ [*fianara*] them (their metaphor) for power. Their training allows them to change from marginal outsiders into the focal productive core of society.

As the young Warriors [*panabaka*] marry and have children they are overtaken by new responsibilities; they become Fathers. They must now concentrate on farming and on caring for their family [cf Bloch 1992b:137 on similar *Zafimaniry* maturation]. It is at this point that they become suitable senior *panjaka* material. Most senior *panjaka* are drawn from the pool of men in this Middle Age category because they are thought to have the required balance of vitality and maturity. This middle period of life, associated with power and control, extends over several decades. However when people reach a critical age (when their hair starts to go white) this era draws to a close; people get too old and are no longer thought of as potential *panjaka*. People in this category are regarded as weakening creatures who have already passed on their land [*tsy mana tany*] and who no longer farm any more [*tsy mamboly*]. They can no longer be trusted to lead effectively because they are thought to already be ‘nearly dead’ [*hony maty*].

People are compared to the natural world and are likened specifically to trees [cf Bloch 1992b:139-140]. When they are young they are like vulnerable saplings [*hazo malemy*]; in middle age they stand strong and tall [*hazo matanjaka*], and in old age they become brittle and drop their leaves before they actually die [*hazo misy tola, tsy misy ravy*]. The life-path of trees parallels the variation in the life-force/potency [*fanahy*] of human beings: it is tiny [*kidy*] and fragile at birth, swells [*mitombo*] to a peak in middle age and then drops away [*midina*] again until death. A graph measuring potency against age would show a bell shaped curve

demonstrating the operation of a Malagasy style seven ages of man.

The connection between maturation, potency and conflict

If we examine the life-cycle model of development the struggle for power and domination seems inevitable. Babies in the womb are fused with the mother and as beings dependent on her are only semi-autonomous ⁷ [cf Astuti 1993]. The struggle between the nature [*toetra*] of the mother and the nature of her unborn child is expressed through the idiom of competing cravings ⁸ and is never fully resolved during pregnancy. Even after they are born children start out soft [*malemy*] and vulnerable [*mora marary*]; they are easily influenced or overwhelmed by the wider environment and must be protected from particularly strong elements ⁹ like water [*rano*] and wind [*rivotra*]. Young babies are not washed in cold water for several months and are sheltered from the wind by staying close to the mother in a special ‘hot house’ [*trano mafana*] within the house ¹⁰ [cf Bloch 1993b:124-131 on *Zafimaniry* houses]. They must be sheltered and protected because they are in a sense still undefined. They are so amorphous that if they die at this stage they are not credited as full human beings [*tsy mbola tena olom-belona*]; instead of being buried in the tomb they are put in shallow unmarked graves and forgotten.

As children grow older they harden up [*manjary mafy*]; they become dynamic living, moving persons [*olom-belona*]. Instead of moulding with the environment and their fellows they begin to clash with them. Conflict and combat [*ady*] (which are celebrated and sought after) result from this hardening, this increasing boundedness and unwillingness to compromise [cf Bloch 1992b:133]. The Warriors [*panabaka*] in particular are thought of as tough [*mahery*] and fiery [*tia ady*] because of this. Senior *panjaka* are even more dangerous because they are moving vessels [*vata mandehandeha*] supercharged with the combined power of all their subjects, including the Warriors. Senior *panjaka* are said to be ‘filled with the vital force of the people’ [*feno ny herin ’vahoaka*]. They become conceptually inseparable from their subjects because they are constituted by, and yet incorporate, all of their subjects in a single body [*ny vatan ’panjaka ny vatan ’olo aby*]. This is why *panjaka* are thought of as especially ‘sharp’ [*maranitra*]; they consist of concentrated hardness and energy [*mafy sy mahery*]. It is due to this ‘sharpness’ [cf



'Panabaka' leading a procession of girls (top); collected *'panjaka'* at a debate (bottom).

Feeley-Harnik 1982:34 for details of 'sharpness' among *Sakalava* royalty] that people say it is very difficult for senior *panjaka* to casually drop in on one another without advance warning. If they do, a spontaneous conflict is likely to flare up because senior *panjaka*, as charged beings, are by their nature combative [cf Errington 1989:26-27 for how relatively equal positions within a flexible hierarchy lead to uncertainty and conflict]. They do not blend into the environment but rather challenge it.

Beyond a certain age, however, potency begins to decline; the 'sharpness' remains but increasing immobility robs it of its power. Sharpness turns into 'brittle bones' [*tola mora vaky*] and strength turns to weakness. Too hard and static [*tsy mandeha*] old people become known as a Keepers of the Village [*piandry tana*], permanent features in the village, who never venture out and who are ready to crumble back into dust and earth [*lasa an tany*]. Old people speak less and less and start to blend into the background; they become more organic and less human. They wear less bright colours, more worn clothes and carry a sterner demeanour and an old walking stick. The older people get the more they lose their human vitality; as they get closer to the tomb they become more fierce [*masiaka*] like a wild animal [*biby*].

Individual nature and the special potency of senior *panjaka*

As we have seen the type of potency you have is determined in part by what stage of life you are at. However potency also depends on the individual [cf Errington 1989:119 on individual potency and changes in potency over time]. It is the particular potency of an individual that makes them an ideal candidate to be a senior *panjaka*. If they are selected they may become even more potent through appropriation of their subjects' potencies. The fact that a selection of certain qualities are sought after means that seniority simply in terms of age is not a critical factor. The oldest representative of a lineage is not necessarily the most important just because he is the closest living link with the ancestors and therefore the best potential conduit for blessing. This sort of ladder idea is de-emphasised. Instead emphasis is put on the overall potency of a man. He must still be vital but beyond this many factors are taken into account: the

family he has generated, the cattle he owns, the rice fields he still works, the followers he has and the supernatural force he can control.

Now that peace reigns the idiom for proving potency has changed; the point of reference has become more agricultural and economic. Now a *panjaka* must give cows to demonstrate his strength and potency. Having cows to give at the appropriate ceremonial occasions (his 'raising up' in particular) is evidence of potency. As we have seen in the previous chapter, being a *panjaka* is an expensive business; people were often very explicit about the fact that cattle wealth had led them to choose a certain *panjaka*. Talking of how a *panjaka* 'had lots to be eaten' [*mana ho hany*] they would laugh at their own apparently cynical motives. A *panjaka* is expected to provide cows at numerous set occasions and public expectations are high. If at a big ceremony a *panjaka* fails to give enough cows or tries to get away with an ageing, or thin cow, people react with disgust. If a *panjaka* consistently fails to deliver, public opinion turns against him and moves to oust him from power may be instigated. He is no longer regarded as potent.

Wealth in cattle is potency that people can see. Having a large herd is likely to influence the choice of a new senior *panjaka*, those with the most cattle being the most obvious candidates. There are however alternative ways of becoming a senior *panjaka* apart from building up a herd and waiting to be chosen. The major alternative is a great challenge and a time consuming process; it involves town-building.

Town-building as a demonstration of potency

Town-building also demonstrates potency and provides an alternative, highly visible, route to becoming a *panjaka*. In theory there are rules about who has the right to build a new Fertile/Big-House and become a senior *panjaka*. However what these rules are concerned with is the splitting off of a constituent part of an already existing Fertile/Big-House. The rules govern the fissioning of ready-made groups, not the coming into being of new groups from scratch. This is the nub of the matter: something that is already made must be strictly governed, whereas something that is newly created can appoint its own master. The inheritance of the leadership

of a ready-made group is something that has not been earned, therefore the rules governing that inheritance must be strict. The creator of something new, on the other hand, is its obvious leader. Thus the rules relating to this way of coming to power are less strict. By creating something one has proven oneself.

To be more specific what a potential leader has to create is a new village filled with his own descendants and supplicants. The point is that to become a senior *panjaka* can be a pro-active process. If a man moves away from his root village, builds up a body of followers and manages to build and have recognised a Fertile/Big-House then he is by default a senior *panjaka*. This is because he has created his own village and his own subjects to rule over. This is why a village is seen ideally as being the descendants of one man. As we have seen the terminology for filiation runs for seven generations, from the head to the toes of the founder so to speak. By the time the seventh generation arrives the town should be full, but the man who started it all, even if he lives to be an aged ‘white hair’ [*fotsy volo*], is likely to be dead. However before he has died he will have acted as senior *panjaka* over his creation.

From homesteads to towns: becoming a named place

The process starts with the initial move outwards from the origin village. This move is realised by starting a homestead [*kombohitra*]. A nuclear family begin to open up new land and make it living [*manomboka mamelona tany*]. The homesteading strategy is open to anybody from the clan [*na ia na ia azo atao kombohitra*]. Outsiders have to ask permission but this is almost always granted. The ethic behind homesteading is the urge to make something ‘full’ [*feno*] and ‘complete’ [*vano*] where before it was ‘empty’ [*fona*] and ‘unfinished’ [*tsy vita*]. People are driven to take advantage of the available land, filling in empty spaces and plugging gaps in the clan territory. Once they have started they are entered into a lifetime commitment to make the homestead come to fruition. This is the time it takes for trees to grow and for the family to multiply sufficiently to constitute a local force to be reckoned with. The growth of a homestead was often explicitly compared to the length of a man’s life. This is because they are thought to run in tandem. Being able to see the growth of one’s homestead gives life meaning and

direction; it is the most visible of achievements and one that everybody notices and comments upon. A simple homestead is known by the name of the homesteader or the hill it is on or by some other local feature. Initially the name of the homestead is unfixed; at a later date it may take on an official name but this is uncertain and depends on how development progresses. In theory the name of a homestead only becomes finally fixed when there is a Fertile/Big-House with a recognised senior *panjaka* in residence. It is at this point that the homestead technically becomes a village/town [cf McKinnon 1991:259-260 on named houses].

Iaban'i Zafitala has not inaugurated a Fertile/Big-House yet even though he is in a position to do so. He still prefers to 'approach' and 'pay homage to' [*manatona*] his origin village. He is temporarily content to accept a subordinate position realising that his homestead is still not quite big enough to host the necessary ceremonies [*fety*]. Consequently his homestead does not have an official set name; it is either known by his name or the name of *Ampanahandrano*, the hill it stands on, or with reference to a nearby mountain called *Vohibetsymisyrahy* [Leafless Mountain]. When the homestead does become a village, as seems inevitable, there will be a choice of names. It might be named Manioc Mountain [*Ambohikazaha*] because *Iaban'i Zafitala* is famous for the amount of manioc he grows or it might be given one of the popular generic names signifying completion and fullness such as *Fenoarivo* [Full-of-a-thousand] or *Mahazoarivo* [Fits-a-thousand]. The names selected, whether associational or generic, come from a fairly limited repertoire. It is as if the creation of each new village is following a set pattern. The creation of a village is a universally recognized phenomenon, repeated across the countryside and understood in roughly the same way. Villages have names because they have earned them and because they represent concentrations of people and power.

Confusion about town-builders

There is a certain confusion as to who can build towns. Often when I asked who was able to build towns I would receive the reply that only senior *panjaka* could build towns because only senior *panjaka* are allowed to build Big-Houses/Fertiles. This oft given but rather literal-minded answer gave the impression that if a non-senior-*panjaka* homesteaded he was always going to

be obliged to go to the old centre for ritual and practical purposes. The answer was confusing because it was obviously apparent that non-senior-*panjaka* were homesteading and eventually building their own Big-Houses. So what is the explanation for the apparent contradiction?

The answer is that becoming a senior *panjaka* from scratch is a process with a sort of invisible defining moment. By this I mean that there is no precise, explicit and agreed point when someone becomes a senior *panjaka* (by the method of town building that is). Everyone accepts that it does happen, they just couldn't tell you exactly when and how. So technically speaking the answer to the question was correct: non-senior-*panjaka* cannot town build. What the answer doesn't take into account is that there is a magical moment when an ordinary man does turn into a senior *panjaka*. It is not instantaneous, the moment is not easily identified, but it does undeniably happen. And once it has happened and the ex-ordinary man is now a senior *panjaka* he can build a Big-House and complete his 'town'.

People also say that only senior *panjaka* can open up the land. What they mean by this is that only someone with the potency and strength characteristic of senior *panjaka* can hope to open up the land successfully. They do not mean that others are not allowed to try, they mean that those without the potential to become a senior *panjaka* will fail. All the comments concerning *panjaka* are looking towards a future outcome. Judgement will depend on this future outcome. A major disincentive to opening up the land is that it is frightening. The supposed constraints put on people are really just excuses for those that are not up to it.

The fact is that people without the potential to become a senior *panjaka* will be debilitated by the fear of the dangers of homesteading and will not attempt it. Only those with the confidence to face up to the challenge will embark on that course of action. Of those that embark on homesteading only some will succeed. To homestead is to pass a testing trial that sorts out who is fit to be a senior *panjaka*. The consequence of the perceived and real dangers of homesteading is striking: the clans cluster closely round *Vondrozo*, complaining about lack of space and fighting over tiny tracts of land when there are vast expanses of empty territory to both north and south.

The marriage of potency and privilege

It should be apparent by now that to be a senior *panjaka* is in large part to prove one's potency. One is either chosen for one's potency, or one demonstrates the required potency by town-building. The point I want to move on to now is that the privileges associated with senior *panjaka* are related to that potency. It is because senior *panjaka* are recognisably powerful and potent in some areas that they have the right to certain honours and services given by their subjects.

It is here that we see the original catch appear again: a senior *panjaka* is obviously more potent than his subjects but only because they help constitute him, firming up his already potent self. There is a delicate balance in operation here between the power of the subjects and the power of the *panjaka*. The *panjaka* is constituted by his subjects, and his potency is derived from the sum of their individual potencies. However, although subjects try and keep the leader as a hostage, subject to their power, they are not entirely successful. In a way they lose control of what they have created as the *panjaka* appropriates their power; this power in turn becoming sacralised and embodied in his person. It is thus easier to make a *panjaka* than to unmake one. This is because the co-operative mechanisms for the creation of *panjaka* are already in place, whereas the means for removing a *panjaka* are informal and rely on a spontaneous ground-swell of opinion against him to stand any chance of success. To try and oust a *panjaka* is a frightening prospect because if one fails one may face retribution from the still potent figure of the *panjaka*.

The holy mouth [*masim-bava*] of senior *panjaka*

The '*masim-bava*' is the holy (as in efficacious/powerful) mouth of a senior *panjaka* and is a prime example of the marriage of potency and privilege. The holy-mouth of a senior *panjaka* is so efficacious precisely because he represents and embodies all his subjects; he is animated by power lent him by them. Consequently the holy-mouth [cf Hurvitz 1986:116; Bloch 1971:163] is so powerful that the senior *panjaka* must restrain it, refraining from speaking unless there is someone to mediate for him. The senior *panjaka* is said not to be able to speak unless there is

a 'friend' [*nama*] present to mediate [cf Errington 1989:287 on the need for potent centres to have spokespersons]; this 'friend' is ideally the Eye of the Water [*mason-drano*].

It is precisely because senior *panjaka* have holy mouths that there are restrictions on their speaking. The power of the holy-mouth makes them dangerous; their words, even if they are spoken by mistake or without justification [*diso*], may be too powerful for the recipient who may be injured or die as a result. This is why senior *panjaka* do not speak much during discussions but rather sit quietly, only intervening to rubber stamp the final decision. This does not mean that the *panjaka* is peripheral to the debate, however. The discussion is deeply affected by *panjaka* because no-one wants to risk earning their disapproval; if they did the *panjaka* might unleash words imbued with power on them.

The ever present threat of the senior *panjaka*'s words means that he is often a silent, apparently marginalised, figure on official occasions. There is often a quietness to a senior *panjaka* in his formal role; however senior *panjaka* are more eager to chat informally when they receive an everyday visit and when the Eye of the Water is not around. Even so there are many taboos for senior *panjaka* which they must respect in order to prevent harm coming to their subjects. They must for example avoid naughty children, taking shelter in the house if they are becoming too irritating. For if they were to lose control and tell them off by swearing [*miteniteny fahatany*] they would involuntarily harm the children.

The general principle underlying concerns about senior *panjakas* verbal contributions stems from the link between anger and words. When A is angry with B the anger moves between them [*mifindra toera*] going from A to B. Anger takes shape in words, so words are vehicles for anger and can be used as weapons. There is the idea of anger as an active, dangerous agent in itself; words provide the vector. Once released in words anger gets out of control and may harm people or rebound back on you. In a more general sense noise is also associated with violence and danger. Parties should be lively and noisy [*maresaka*] but this is always suggestive of potential or actual violence, often in the form of drunken brawls. Noise and words are carriers of danger and violence and are thought to be responsible for many ills. When a story is being recounted of some terrible misfortune or gruesome injury the listeners block their mouths with a clenched fist

and go “Ah-ah-aaaaah” in horror and empathy. It is as if they want to plug the cause of such problems - noise, disquiet and violence. They are reacting like someone here who, on seeing statistics on the connection between heart-disease and cholesterol, pushes the butter away while clutching their heart.

Senior *panjaka* and debates [*kabaro*]

At debates [*kabaro*] in general senior *panjaka* get given the prize positions . Indoors they lounge by the cool eastern opening of the house, back against the wall; outdoors they sit on banana leaves in the shade of the coffee bushes. In the outdoor scenario wooden barriers are set up to form an open space. The senior *panjaka*, who are the only people allowed to sit around the edge, can lean back against these; they relax in comfort, stretching out their legs and putting their heads down for a quick snooze. Everyone else is huddled uncomfortably in the middle ground, jammed against someone else, with no back support and arms around knees to balance themselves.

Before the debate starts the senior *panjaka* will brief his Eye of the Water so that he may do the talking in his place. The Eye of the Water introduces the issue for discussion and the debate is opened to the floor. Initially the debate is quite subdued. When ordinary people speak at these debates they seem ashamed; often their voice trembles; they don’t look at anyone but rather look straight ahead, fixing on a random point in the middle distance to focus on. It is as if they are trying to distance themselves from and disown their own speech. They try to make it an unembodied action, letting the power be in the words and nothing else. As the debate progresses it normally becomes more and more vehement and out of control as everyone gets fired up. Even so the senior *panjaka* presiding normally remains silent. The underlying tension behind the event stems from the fact that the senior *panjaka* doesn’t say much but that when he does (at an unspecified point) he will be particularly vicious [*masiaka*]. The theory is that the people should be able to decide for themselves. It is only when they are obviously unable or unwilling to agree that the senior *panjaka* is forced to intervene, more often than not extremely bad-temperedly, to end it or literally ‘cut it off’ [*mahatapaka*]. Until this point the senior *panjaka* is like a sleeping giant; only his threat is present. When the senior *panjaka* is finally forced to speak his entry into

the fray signals the end of the combat. No-one is allowed to contradict or add to his final summing up and ending of the matter [cf Beaujard 1983a:325 for a *Tanala* equivalent]. It is the sharpness of the senior *panjaka* that cuts the talk [*resaka*] off and definitively ends the discussion.

The intention of this section was to demonstrate how the right and privilege of the senior *panjaka* to stand in judgement and make decisions for all his subjects is directly related to his potency. He can rule because he has the perceived power and potency to do so; he is feared and therefore he is obeyed. It is only if there is a dramatic sea-change in public opinion, the majority of the subjects deciding all at the same time to stop supporting him, that his potency can be undermined and people can go against his decisions. However this is made unlikely by the fact that senior *panjaka* are often relatively silent and uncontroversial. Other privileges of senior *panjaka* are also related to their potency, polygamy providing a fine example.

All men should get married and have children during the course of their lives. Senior *panjaka*, as ‘supermen’, must be married and must have children in order to qualify and be suitable for their position. Fertility in a straightforward sense is another sign of their potency. It is not therefore surprising that it is senior *panjaka* who are considered most likely to have more than one wife at the same time [cf Simonse 1992:233 on this as a strategy for producing followers]. In fact it is only senior *panjaka* that are meant to be allowed to take more than one wife [*mampirafy*]. This is not a hard and fast rule but rather recognition by the people that it is only senior *panjaka* who are strong enough to be able to satisfy the demands of rival wives [cf Bloch 1981b on *Sakalava* polygamy]. The right to do something is associated with the ability to do it. Senior *panjaka* may take extra wives because they can ¹¹; by doing so they prove another side of their potency.

Rights to agricultural labour of subjects

Senior *panjaka* have had and still maintain some rights to the agricultural labour of their subjects [cf Feeley-Harnik 1986]. In the past the most senior Earth-Shaker of the *Vohilakatra* clan

controlled all the labour of his subjects for one day in May every year. In one day the subjects would trample [*manosy*] all the Earth-Shaker's rice paddies [*tani-kosy*] with their cattle. Now only the Earth-Shakers own Belly [*troky*] help him because it is recognised that life is hard for everybody [*efa sarotra ny fiaina*]. For the rest of the year the Earth-Shaker works the land himself.

Some less senior *panjaka* still maintain rights to agricultural labour also. It is normally limited to one day so the senior *panjaka* tends to use the labour to help complete the big job of harvesting all his paddies. The senior *panjaka* marshals the operation as the women bring in the rice and the men transport it to the town. All the senior *panjaka* is required to do is provide food, consisting of rice and some cheap accompaniment such as red beans [*sambeza*]. Huge vats of rice steam on open fires as the overwrought women sing, joke around and harvest in long lines. Trails of burdened men struggle from the paddy to the granary in the village, transporting the cut grain. The senior *panjaka* looks on, occasionally shouting an order or goading them to work faster so as to make the most of his one day.

What is interesting about work done by the subjects in the *panjaka*'s fields is that it is carried out with good humour and great energy [cf Feeley-Harnik 1982]. The justification for doing the work does not seem to rest on simple fear of the senior *panjaka*; the work is obviously seen as his due but it is constructive in a wider sense also. People enjoy it because they feel it is contributing to general well-being [*mahafaly fa mahabe*]. It is important to reflect on the fact that it is the senior *panjaka* who is responsible for the general fertility of the land. If his harvest is successful it is indicative of a potential communal success. The subjects perceive that they are indirectly working for themselves; by helping the senior *panjaka* they are helping themselves because their 'work makes the land fertile' [*ny asa mahalonaky ny tany*].

Outside of the one day a year of tribute labour it is very important that senior *panjaka* work the land themselves; they cannot just be associated ritually with the land they must be associated practically and physically as well. The day a senior *panjaka* stops working in the fields is the day people will start saying he should go. People would talk with amazement about senior *panjaka* of groups found to the east who did not work the land; they could not understand how



Standing stones to a great chieftain of the past (top); harvesting *panjaka*'s fields (bottom)

people could be out of contact with the land and yet still rule it. Once again we see how the potency of the *panjaka* earns him his privilege; it is because he is thought to bring the whole land to life that people are willing to help him on his particular piece.

It should be clear by now that the senior *panjaka* is most privileged in the areas he is most potent. This is how privilege and potency are connected. His fortes are making decisions, taking women, and farming (metaphorically as well as literally) the land. Thus he has the right to stand in judgement over others, to take several women as wives and to receive agricultural labour from his subjects. There is a very delicate balance here with the senior *panjaka* only having a tenuous hold on power. The moment his perceived potency fades his actual powers and privileges evaporate away also. In order to demonstrate this I will show how a failure on the part of *panjaka* to control cattle-theft led to the creation of a new and alternative authority system, the *Dina*.

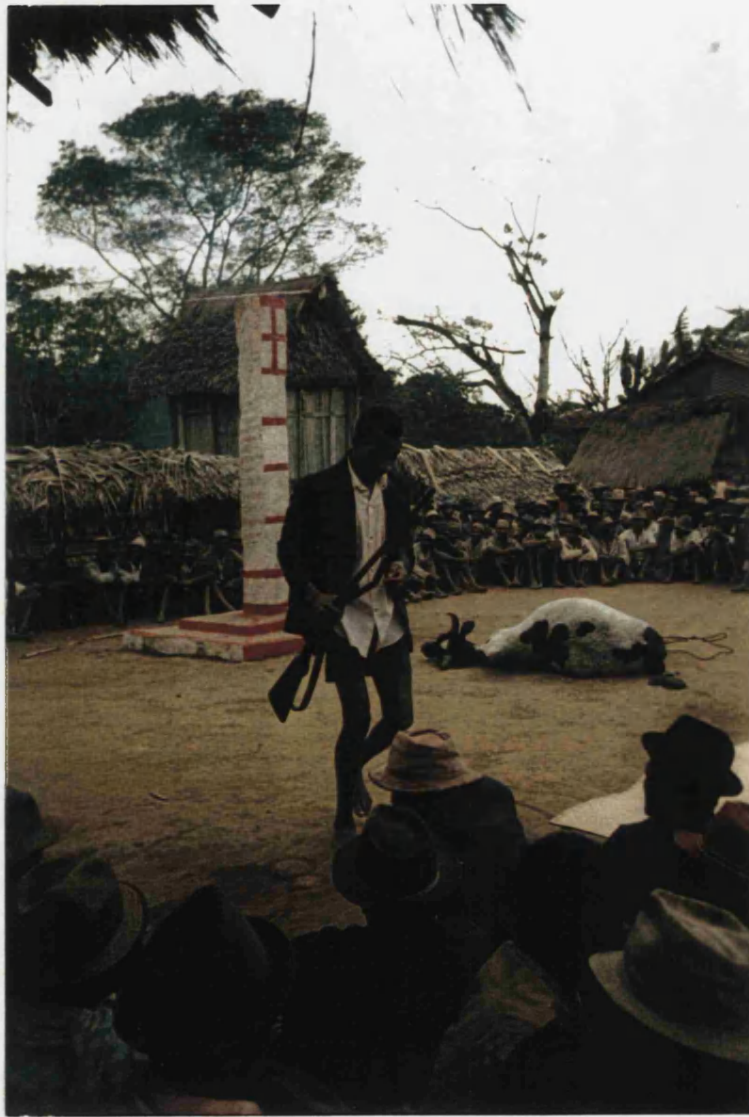
Section 2: the *Dina*

The nature and purpose of the organisation

The *Dina* is an organisation designed to promote security and guarantee public order in the absence of any effective state authorities [cf Elli 1993:54]. It is primarily concerned with thefts (most importantly of cattle), fights, murder and witchcraft. The only area in which it is conspicuous by its absence is that of land disputes; these are still exclusively dealt with by traditional *panjaka* and their courts. The *Dina*, unlike the traditional *panjaka* style authority system, is a very recent innovation. It was instituted in the *Sahafatra* area in 1989 in reaction to the impossible situation arising from the increasing power of the bandits. By this stage the bandits were already running out of control; they were not only stealing cattle, they were also massacring the local population [cf Elli 1993:49-56]. There was no system of social control that could restrain them; either they were outsiders who did not fall under the judicial and moral authority of the localised *panjaka* and who were therefore untouchable except in terms of physical force, or, even worse, they were of people of *Sahafatra* who had begun to flout the unspoken and unwritten conventions concerning cattle theft.

Cattle-theft has by all accounts always been a popular past-time in *Sahafatra*, a way of proving yourself, getting one over your neighbour and rapidly gaining wealth. However in the past it was regarded somewhat as a game; a game that was not necessarily violent and that relied as much on stealth, cunning, tactical alliances and sworn blood-brothers as on sheer brute force [cf Wilson 1992:84-85 on *Tsimihety* cattle rustling]. The attachment of the people of *Sahafatra* to cattle-rustling is illustrated by the immense folk-lore surrounding the sport. Each family has its tale to tell; many recall how as children they were 'bribed' [*omena solotra*] to keep quiet about harboured animals, stolen by kin, by being given as much dried, salted meat [*piky/kitoza*] as they could eat.

The cunning tricks used by robbers are often recounted with fascination: how they hold onto the tails of the cows with their feet on the hind legs and brush-wood dragging behind so as to leave no trail; how they like to strike in the middle of the night as a storm rages so all trace of their passage will be obliterated; how they know all the back-routes and secret ways through the forest;



Party to celebrate the unveiling of a commemorative stone to the *Dina*

how they kill and abandon the carcass of a cow if they are being hard pressed by their pursuers in order to tempt the hungry posse to stop and eat; how they disguise stolen cows by remoulding the shape of the horns with the stem of a banana plant [*bakan-akondro*]; how they change the colour of the coat of the animals by applying red-hot sand [*fasika*] which lightens the hide and changes the pattern; and how the cows are distributed among many herds to make them untraceable. There is a sense of wonder about the world of rustling. People talk of the magical powers and potent charms [*aody mahery*] of successful cattle thieves; they talk of them as giant sized men three metres tall [*telo metatra*] who can cover great distances in unbelievably short time ¹² and who cannot be brought down by bullets alone [*tsy vonoina basibasy*]. The wonder is, however, now tainted; the modern day ruthlessness of the gangs has made cattle-thieves reviled as much as admired; the mystical awe with which they were once viewed has waned.

The dramatic change in the nature of rustling came with the influx of powerful weapons and the emergence of professional gangs onto the scene in the 1980's. Before then reciprocal cattle-theft had been a never-ending game that allowed individuals to express themselves and their clan pride but which nevertheless worked out as more or less even in the end. Suddenly this was no longer the case; almost overnight the traditional limitations put on the sport were abandoned and it became a cut-throat, get-rich-quick scheme involving merciless terror campaigns. Instead of cattle merely circulating around the local clans they were being removed wholesale, at gun-point, from the entire region.

It began to be recognised that outside forces were at work. Rumour spread of how government weapons were mysteriously disappearing from the military armouries in the southern highlands and ending up in the hands of the bandits. Suspicion increased that politicians were involved in the trade, supplying weapons and turning a blind eye in return for a cut of the spoils [cf Elli 1993:51]. Fears got so out of control that paranoia began to set in: people believed that special roads were being built just to ferry the cattle to secret ports on the coast from where they could be exported to satisfy insatiable foreign demand. What made matters even worse was that local men were believed to have got caught up in the trade. The crisis point came when local men were not only implicated in the anti-social, large-scale raiding in general but were also recognised as being responsible for preying on their own kin; children were said to be killing their own

parents [*mamono ny iaba sy ny endry ny zanaka avao*]. The commands of the *panjaka* were ignored [*tsy arakaraka ny didin-panjaka*], the critical ties of kinship were broken and the whole system began to break down.

The source of life, fertility, wealth and communality to be found in the cattle of the community was being selfishly stolen away and killed for all the wrong reasons. Instead of cattle being used to trample the family rice-paddies they were being stolen; instead of cattle being used as sacrificial offerings to the ancestors they were being sold for personal profit. It was feared that cattle would run out [*ho lany ny aomby*] and that everyone would be reduced to poverty [*mahantra*]. The bovine social glue that held everything together, both practically and ritually, was losing its adhesion and beginning to come unstuck [cf Elli 1993:55-56; Faublee 1954:85¹³]. The final straw came when sons began to kill the fathers who remonstrated with them [*ny iaba mananatra, vonoina zanany*]. The surviving *panjaka* decided that it was time for action. Already by this stage far flung hamlets had gravitated back together [*nivory*] for security. When you are walking around the land of *Sahafatra* today people will often point out where they used to have a house until the threat of bandits forced them to move. Many have more dramatic stories of kin who have been killed [*vonoina*], or of houses burnt [*dorana*] to the ground; many carry scars from bullet wounds; all remember the favourite haunts and escape routes of the bandits [*lala dahalo*] and still refuse to live in these places. When the threat was at its greatest people regrouped themselves and took stock of the situation, searching for a more effective deterrent.

The idea of the *Dina* was already floating around the countryside by this stage. The first *Dinas* had by then come into existence in other areas and word was spreading about this new social organisation that combatted banditry. The concept was simple: small groups that had been struggling independently with the problem should come together to form a united front in opposition to the thieves and murderers. This was a very attractive idea because it was appreciated that the authority of the local *panjaka* was undermined and was no longer sufficient to handle the crisis. Earth-Shakers representing individual clans were ineffective in countering the problem because they had no jurisdiction outside their own delimited territories. In addition, Earth-Shakers were not predisposed to inter-clan contact: their holy mouths were effective in dealing with internal clan issues but were not suited to delicate inter-clan negotiations which

required tact and flexibility in place of autocratic rule. The problem was that the proposed combination of clans to institute a para-legal protection system, however appealing, was previously unheard of. How could clans who had been competing and stealing from each other in the past successfully come together to run a complex, co-operative neighbourhood watch scheme?

The plan to unite had one key factor in its favour: it was not only sanctioned by the *panjaka*, it was actually proposed by them. The Earth-Shakers decided, in conjunction with the Eyes of the Water, that a separate, independent authority system, more oriented towards the public domain, was needed in order to bypass the problems of the inward-looking traditional regimes. The existing powers, therefore, did not try and hinder the creation of a new system but were in fact the most active movers in the whole process. This was important: people said that if the *panjaka* had not been involved there would have been no way of brokering the agreement between clans [*laha tsy ekena panjaka, tsy mety mifanaiky raza hafa*]. The *panjaka* had the authority and the desire; they were willing to sign away some of their authority in a pragmatic bid to stabilise the situation. *Panjaka* had come together in the past to sort out inter-group problems (most notably the incursion of foreign armies), so the precedent had already been set; however there had never been such a broad and inclusive scheme. Previously pairs of clans had sworn themselves into alliances [*piziva*] but this only resulted in an unsophisticated system of cross-cutting relationships and failed to provide a vehicle for proper, broad consensus. The *Dina* was designed to be truly representative, an organ of the people, for the people, involving the whole population. The term *Dina* means something that has been chewed over, deliberated over and discussed [from the active verb '*mandinika*']; it is a charter that has been agreed to. The formation of the *Dina* was, thus, a very explicit and public act of creation.

The structure of the *Dina*

In accordance with the principles of equality and inclusion it was decided by the senior *panjaka* that each clan wanting to join the *Dina* should elect a representative. These representatives would meet to form a council which would be headed by one of their number. The overall head, to be

known as the '*President ny Dina*', would be chosen by the clan representatives but would have to be approved by the general populace¹⁴. He would then also appoint himself a lieutenant. While we were in the field the '*President ny Dina*' was a man called *Iaban'i Fano*, of the *Antsoro* clan; his lieutenant was *Nahoezafo*, of the *Lohanosy* clan. The representative council, in conjunction with the people, hammered out a 'constitution' that clearly stated what punishments should be given for what crimes, and what compensation should be given, by whom, for unrecovered cattle. This set up the basic charter¹⁵ by which the *Dina* of the *Sahafatra* could operate. The charter was divided into two sections: the 'tough laws' [*didy mahery*] and the 'small claims' [*dina madinika*].

The 'small claims' concerned minor issues such as the theft of chickens, bananas, manioc etc or damage done to crops by wandering pigs; all 'small claims could be dealt with through a graded system of fines [*sazy*], the maximum of which was 45,000 *ariary*¹⁶. Of the money given in fines only a small portion was ever given to the plaintiff; a third was put away for later use in a strong box [*aprimana ampahatelony amin'ny caisse*] (eg for when the *Dina* of the *Sahafatra* was obliged to pay an indemnity), and the rest was divided up [*zaray ny ambiny*] between council members who usually spent their share on drink to be consumed by all who had taken part in the justice process [*hanin'fokon-olo ny vola*]. The 'tough laws' were concerned with serious crimes punishable by death; they stated that cattle thieves caught in the cattle pen [*valan'aomby*] or on the 'backside' of stolen cattle [*ambody-aomby*] without ownership papers [*paseporon-aomby* = cow passport] would be killed on the spot [cf Elli 1993:54]; murderers [*pamono olo*] and witches [*pamosavy*] would likewise be summarily executed. These laws were not to be taken lightly; during our time in the field we heard of three people being killed in our district, two for cattle rustling and one for manslaughter¹⁷.

The enforcement of justice

All were agreed on the principles of administering justice; now all that remained was to effectively enforce these principles. The *Dina* was designed to be able to enforce its laws through military force and coercion. The *Dina* is therefore structured like an army [*miaramila*]

with a branching system of command. In each village there are wardens [*olom-be ny Dina*] and keepers of the peace [*fandria-palemana*] who report upwards to their *Dina* clan representative. This makes the *Dina* a very flexible instrument of authority; its structure extends from a very local village level to encompass a whole bloc of clans¹⁸. An intra-clan problem will still be decided by *panjaka* without reference to other clans whereas an inter-clan problem will be introduced into the general public forum of the *Dina*. Even if only two clans are involved the whole council technically has its say in the outcome.

The hierarchical organisation of the *Dina* means that it can be mobilised at many different levels depending on the nature of the problem. A small theft only necessitates a local mobilisation whereas an incursion by a foreign group (from outside the territory of the *Dina*) who have stolen many head of cattle will require the mobilisation of all the clans that constitute the *Dina* of the *Sahafatra*¹⁹. The more serious the theft the more people must be mobilised so that they can effectively make chase and ensure that they catch the robbers.

Negotiation of the charter

As we have said the *Dina* is a chartered agreement; the details of how different crimes should be treated has essentially already been negotiated through a process of debate [*kabaro*]. It is important to note, however, that although there is a council of *Dina* representatives and an accepted constitution, the council cannot operate in the absence of the people. Each individual decision-making process takes the form of a discussion [*kabaro*] open to everyone. The *Dina* is like a structured state of flux; everyone gets their say, their chance to express their opinion, and to give their side of the argument until a generally accepted consensus is reached [*rehefa mitovy ny resaka ny olo aby da mikatoka ny kabaro*]. Anyone who interrupts a speaker out of turn or who makes distinction between people according to rank [*maniva*] is fined because in a *Dina* debate [*kabaro*] everyone should be equal²⁰.

The notion of consensus makes it very important how many people you have on your side and what threat you present if you are not satisfied with the outcome. The *Dina* is about marshalling

your forces; even though the 'law' [*didy*] is meant to be clear the fact is that the more people you can bring to bear, the more weight your argument/version of events has and the more likely you are to receive a favourable outcome. This is important at any level but it is critical in inter-*Dina* (the *Dina of Sahafatra* is just one of many) disputes where you may have to defend your case outside your own territory. Precisely because there are many *Dinas* [*maro-poitra ny Dina*] in the region ²¹ one must be prepared to defend the charter of ones own *Dina* against the counter claims of others. The outcome of such a joint council debate [*kabaro*] normally depends on the mastery one has of words, sayings, proverbs and idioms and on a demonstration of strength in numbers compared to the other side. To achieve this strength in numbers requires the pre-existence of a well organised system, a clear line of command, great logistical skill, discipline, determination and persistence. The *Dina* can thus be seen as a tool for power diplomacy, visualised in terms of threatening armies and worked out in terms of pragmatic compromises.

When the *Dina* of the *Tanilo* came from the south to *Vondrozo* to claim compensation for its stolen cows all the talk was of how many '*firaisa*' (administrative districts each thought to consist of a thousand men) they represented; they brought so many armed men (9 '*firaisa*') and were so intimidating that they were not allowed to enter the town, being obliged to make an encampment in a nearby village instead. Although the bulk of the *Tanilo* never entered *Vondrozo*, their invisible presence could not but help strengthen their argument; all the people of *Sahafatra* agreed that they could not and should not be denied their compensation lest they take the law into their own hands.

How cattle thefts are dealt with by the *Dina*

When a theft is spotted the alarm is immediately raised. In the countryside this involves sounding the conch shell [*antsiva*] (there should be one in every Big-House) repeatedly until all the neighbours have been roused; in town it means ringing the church bell continuously. On hearing the alarm every able bodied man must assemble [*mamoaka tana*] so that a pursuit team/posse can be put together; anyone who does not appear will be fined and is likely to be suspected of the theft.

The most senior *Dina* representative present selects and organizes the posse, gathering together as many armed ²² men as possible, who set off in chase. These men are known as the trackers [*panara-dia*] and follow the hoof-prints of the stolen cattle [*dia ny aomby*] until they reach the next village. They must be accompanied by the actual owner of the cattle [*tompon aomby*] and his close kinsmen so that the cows can be positively identified. When they reach the next village they in turn rouse the inhabitants. Direct responsibility for the chase is handed on to them like a baton; now that the thieves have strayed into their territory they must take up the pursuit also. This process continues in a sort of chain reaction, fresh legs replacing tired ones as each new village is activated. The onus to capture the thieves or the cattle, or to unequivocally demonstrate that the tracks have left your territory moves from village to village across the countryside.

If the pursuers are forced to carry on the chase far away from home, supply lines have to be set up. Each household is required to provide a few cups of rice which goes towards a communal supply known as the 'vatsy' (the vat) which is transported by messengers [*iraka*] to wherever the posse has reached. This requisition system means that the pursuers are able to carry on the chase regardless, knowing that food will follow on after them. Efficient organisation allows posses to stray over 100 miles (past *Ivohibe* for example) from where they set out. There are not many possible conclusions to the chase; either the cows are captured or the tracks are lost at some point. Even when the cows are caught the thieves normally escape; if however they should fail to get away they are put to death.

Two methods of killing are favoured, both ensuring communal responsibility [cf Elli 1993:54]: either a long cord is tied round the thief's neck, he is pulled over [*lavo*] and dragged along the ground by all until he dies [*atao menavozo*]; or his hands and feet are tied together, he is attached to a heavy stone and thrown in the nearest river, the body being held under water with a piece of wood [*tsindrina amin'ny hazo*] until he drowns. Whatever method is used the body is not allowed to enter the tomb afterwards [*azo alevina nefa tsy azo miditra an-kibory*]. If the thieves are recognised but not caught their families must pay a fine of five cows each [*voasazy aomby dimy*].

If the cattle are found that is a satisfactory result and unless there is strong evidence that the

thieves came from a particular group the episode is declared to be over; the matter is closed. However if the cows are not recovered the issue becomes far more contentious. The theory is that wherever the tracks are lost, then that area must bear the responsibility for compensation. The logic behind this is that either the people were incompetent or more likely they were in cahoots with the thieves [*naman-pangalatra*] and let them get away; either way they are guilty, whether it be of negligence or conspiracy. Therefore they must supply the replacement cows. Not surprisingly this is where problems arise; there is much argument as to where the tracks were lost and who lost them. People will use every trick in the book to avoid responsibility, duping other groups into accepting a handover when in fact the tracks have been lost already²³. This is when the Council is really needed. A forum is held until the issue of responsibility is cleared up; then the amount of compensation (including expenses incurred) is decided. The guilty group must pay it without delay.

Deciding the payment of damages

If it is an intra-*Dina* matter the major difficulty is deciding who is liable; once that liability has been allocated the compensation is pretty much worked out by a set formula and is straightforwardly calculated. However if it is an inter-*Dina* issue everything becomes much more complex. Firstly the threat of overt violence rears its ugly head - the relationship between *Dinas* (which are sometimes thought of as 'sisters' [*rahavavy*]) is far more agonistic than that between groups within a *Dina*; secondly the attribution of responsibility must be delicate but firm; thirdly, even when responsibility is decided, the working out of the compensation is problematical. This is because each *Dina* works out its own code separately so that their ideas of appropriate compensation may be very different; the *Tanilo*, for example, demand two cows compensation for each cow lost as opposed to the *Sahafatra* who only ask one. A major debate [*kabaro*] involving rhetorical skill and the marshalling of fighting forces is normally required in order to reach a compromise.

When the *Tanilo* were encamped outside *Vondrozo Iaban'i Fano* needed all his wits about him to achieve a reasonable settlement. The *Tanilo* said they had lost eight cows and therefore

wanted sixteen in compensation, plus one extra for the owner, and one to pay for the efforts of the trackers [*panara-dia*] ²⁴: eighteen in total. *Iaban'i Fano* replied by saying that such rules were practised by no other *Dina* and therefore were unacceptable. He emphasised that the *Tanilo* were strangers [*vahiny*] and that consequently they must accept the local rules. To stress the point he recounted a short parable:

“When I have a guest I kill a chicken for him” he said. “If when the chicken is cooked the guest turns round and says that it is taboo for him to eat chicken, well, I say no problem; he can sit and watch while I eat it myself”.

Everyone laughed at this, the moral of the story being quite clear: the customs of the guest are all well and good as long as he respects the ways of the host. *Iaban'i Fano* went on to point out to the *Tanilo* that the thief had never been caught and that therefore there was no evidence that the *Sahafatra* were at fault. He grinned at the *Tanilo* and said that of course if the thief had been local he would have been happy to pay all that they asked for, but since that was not the case, and since there were no thieves in *Sahafatra* (!), it was irrelevant. He threw in another proverb for good measure: “The fire is burnt and only ashes are left” [*dorana afo, lasa lakevo*] he concluded so as to make his position absolutely clear. Eventually the *Tanilo*, impatient to go home, conceded the point. “Thank you” [*misaotry!*] said *Iaban'i Fano* ingratiatingly, looking to his followers for the appreciation he seemed to crave so much.

Feeling that he had the upper-hand *Iaban'i Fano* tried to press home his advantage. He wondered aloud why the trackers had initially said there were five lost cattle whereas now the ownership papers they presented claimed there were eight. Wasn't there a small discrepancy here? The *Tanilo* retorted sharply that their ‘passport’ [*paseporo*] was ‘clean’ [*madio*] and boasted that the papers [cf Elli 1993:54] had even been sent to Antananarivo (the capital of Madagascar) to be cleared by the government [*fanjaka*]. *Iaban'i Fano* was not impressed by this and put on his best angry face. Why were they talking about the government? Government business is government business and *Dina* business is *Dina* business; each have their own sphere of authority and the two should never be mixed up. “I'm not frightened of foreigners” [*tsy atahorako vazaha*]

he said disparagingly, meaning that he, unlike the *Tanilo* apparently, paid no heed to officialdom. “I have two foreigners of my own” he said, pointing at us proudly, and provoking an uproarious laugh.

In spite of his verbal victory, *Iaban'i Fano* decided to be diplomatic. Having won the earlier concession he appeared nervous of pushing the *Tanilo* too far and therefore accepted their version of events even though he insisted the truth of the matter was unclear. By saying that there had been no proper inquiry or proof of culpability [*tsy nisy porofy na inquiry*], *Iaban'i Fano* managed to maintain the moral high ground while avoiding the risk of open confrontation. As a result eight cows were paid to the *Tanilo*, who, outmanoeuvred, were obliged to leave in peace even though they were not entirely satisfied²⁵.

Official or unofficial?

Part of the power of the *Dina* stems from the fact that it in theory receives the blessing of the government. People believe that a letter was sent to the President of the Republic²⁶ who granted permission for the *Dina* to come into existence and outlined its authority. I do not believe that this official rubber stamping ever went all the way to the top but there certainly is a tacit agreement between the forces of law and order and the *Dina* [*mifanaiky amin'ny fanjaka aby*]. If the *Dina* sees fit to fine or punish someone then the gendarmes do not interfere; if the *Dina* judges that someone should be put to death and goes through with the execution they are not in any danger of prosecution themselves [*tsy mety igadra*].

The two systems of justice run in parallel [*mifanaraka*] but the government forces of law and order are passive whereas the *Dina* is active; the *Dina* is local community based, while the gendarmes barracks is mainly manned by outsiders. The irony of the situation is that the gendarmes in a sense provide sanctuary for the robbers; if a robber is worried that he will be caught he may go to the gendarmes so that they may protect him from the wrath of the *Dina*; for although the gendarmes bow to the authority of the *Dina* [*ambony ny Dina fa matanjaka*], recognising them as the true authority in the land, they will not actually hand over someone in

their custody. The gendarmes tend to try and distance themselves from local affairs but when an incident enters their jurisdiction, when a thief delivers himself into their laps, they cannot ignore their responsibilities. This state of play often leaves members of the *Dina* intensely frustrated; not only do the gendarmes refuse to go out in pursuit of robbers in case they put themselves in any danger, they also end up protecting the thieves and then eventually accepting bribes [*solotra*] to let them go. The *Dina* which has normally organised a posse to follow in pursuit and catch the robbers is forced to demand and beg for the prisoner in order to deliver what they see as justice. Often the *Dina* will camp outside a gendarmerie, symbolically laying siege, in a final attempt to wrestle the criminal from the clutches of his unlikely rescuers. However it is very rare for the gendarmes to hand the culprit over.

The impotence of *panjaka*

The very existence of the *Dina* demonstrates the failure of the *panjaka* and the central government to control cattle-rustling in rural areas. It also shows how power is derived from potency: since traditional leaders could not control the situation an alternative means of governance had to be found. It thus came to pass that in the areas where traditional leaders were unable to prove their potency they had their power taken away from them.

The case of the *Dina*, in which traditional leaders cannot run the *Dina* because they are not judged capable of doing so, exemplifies the argument I have been trying to develop in the first part of the thesis, namely that it is only by constantly proving oneself that one can rule over that which one has not generated. Since power is based on performance traditional leaders [*panjaka*] who cannot prove themselves find themselves in a hopelessly undermined position and cease to hold any authority over their people.

Endnotes

1. I translate the word '*panabaka*' as warriors because '*panabaka*' were likened to members of an army [*miaramila*]. In the past warriors [*panabaka*] also used to be known as '*fanalolahy*', a term which denotes agile and able persons.

2. '*Panabaka*' chat up women shamelessly. At the end of any party you will see boys approach girls, standing behind them with arms wrapped around them in order to whisper conspiratorially in their ear. The boys try and persuade the girls to make an assignation with them for later on; if a girl agrees they depart hand in hand, if not she dodges away and skips off with her friends. The boys, however, are not easily disheartened; if they are turned down by one girl they will simply proceed onto the next, using exactly the same tactics as before until they succeed. The girls who have rebuffed them previously often look on crestfallen, disappointed because of the fickle nature of the boys' affections. Later on, as darkness falls, couples disappear into the coffee bushes; however before they can lie down the boy must light a match to frighten away any spirits; only then can the secret tryst be consummated.

3. The people of *Sahafatra* practice boxing [*moraingy*] in contrast to their neighbours to the west, the *Bara*, who practice wrestling [*ringa*].

4. Another ad hoc explanation given by informants for the name '*panabaka*' is that they are people who are in a transitional stage, a status likened to a ferry ('bac' in French) crossing a river.

5. Each clan has at least one Chief of the Warriors [*panjakan'panabaka*] (also known as '*panjaka ny kidabo*'); however most have a Chief of the Warriors for each Belly. The *Masitafika* provide an exception to this rule: only two out of three Bellies have a Chief of the Warriors at any one time, the positions rotating between Bellies [*isan tao miova ny panjaka ny kidabo*]. The *Masitafika* custom is also odd in that the Chief of the Warriors can only wear the white '*soto*' once, and this when his term in office is up [*lany*]. In general the Chief of the Warriors only serves a short term between one and three years (unlike senior *panjaka* who tend to serve for much longer periods); this is so that several people may get an opportunity to 'rule' and so that there can be more practice holding the appropriate ceremonies.

6. We witnessed one such ceremony in the village of *Manotronotro* (clan *Lohanosy*). All the elders remained in the Fertile/Big-House while the '*panabaka*' held court in a small house to one side. The whole operation was like a dry run for the youth element overseen, but not directed, by the adults. It provided a model for the important business of becoming a senior *panjaka* in the future. There was more of a party atmosphere than at a normal 'raising up' with a hired musician playing the accordion [*pitendry gordo*] and much dancing and merriment led by local drum [*aponga*] and flute [*sodina*] players. Young women performed a shuffling dance around the village, their bare feet slapping the earth as they progressed in a conga-like line, whooping excitedly and flaunting themselves and their smart clothes in front of the boys. Eventually, at the appointed time, everyone crammed into, or as near as possible to, the house where the future Chief of the Warriors waited. His head was ceremonially bedecked with a dirty white rag, the '*soto fotsy*', and his wife's, the Royal Woman's [*ampela hova*], with the '*sartroka batrelaky*'. The official duties completed, the cow was slaughtered and the party continued throughout the night.

7. When a woman is pregnant she is big bellied [*be voky*] and is already regarded as being with child or having a child [*manan-anaky*]. There is a definite awareness that there is already a living being inside her with its own distinct nature. The baby is contained within the mother; it is also physically connected to her by the umbilical cord which will have to be cut with a knife to separate them. In a sense then the baby is fused with the mother; baby and mother are as one. This idea of oneness is however misleading. Although the baby is completely dependent on the mother it has an autonomous nature of its own. The confusion arises because of the nature of their relationship: for the baby everything is mediated by the mother; any communication or attempt to satisfy a desire on the part of the baby must be expressed through her. Equally any outside force that may influence the baby must pass through her. As a result autonomy of the baby is hard to discern as it is invisible to the outside

world. The baby is literally a dependent of the mother, fed by her and enveloped in her body. The baby, a soft, unformed jellylike entity is cocooned and protected in the womb. However the shapelessness, malleability and dependence of the baby does not mean that it is aimless and totally helpless; the already existing character and orientation of the baby means that it can wield a powerful force of desire that influences the mother also. Women themselves are also thought of as malleable; they are jokingly referred to as soft furnishings [*fanaka malemy*]. This implied softness makes them ideal for carrying babies as they are not overwhelming presences but are instead 'giving' mothers. The baby is being housed by the mother; it is the demonstrated compatibility and the negotiated accommodation of the two natures in one body that generates the intense link between mother and child. This intimate interaction of natures is an experience only shared by women accounting for the mystically close connection felt to travel down the female line. Women and their unborn children are joined and yet they are separate; they are involved in a gentle struggle between competing but allied wills. Pregnancy is a delicate balance between fusion, seepage and joint identification and its opposite, the differentiation and separation required to eventually end up with two people instead of one. This tension is evident in the terminology used for the womb. The womb is the '*trano-zaza*', the house of the child. It is as if the woman herself is a house inside which there is another house; the woman is housing the child but the child also has a house of its own. Dependence and autonomy are rolled into one. This tension is constantly played out during pregnancy. The baby is compromised by the presence and enforced proximity of the mother and must find a way of asserting itself.

8. A very apparent area of contested identity is to be found in the competing cravings of mother and baby. During pregnancy mothers experience cravings for certain unspecified types of food. As it is believed that the physical characteristics of a baby may be determined by the food the mother eats during pregnancy it could be said that the cravings of the mother have a tangible effect on the baby. At a seemingly common-sense level it is said that a mother who eats fattening foods like bananas, biscuits and milk will have a big baby. However if we examine another case it becomes apparent that it is not the nutritional quality of the food only that effects the baby but also the associations of the food. Thus if a woman has a craving for a certain type of food and eats large quantities of it the baby may take on aspects of that food. For example if she eats crab the baby may develop claw-like arms and may scuttle along or drool saliva copiously as a crab does. It is clear that what the food causes is removed way beyond the consequences of mere calorific intake. A baby can take on the physical appearance of the food, the habitual behaviour of the food, or any abstract qualities associated with the food. The implication is that the cravings of the mother determine the nature of the baby. However the issue is not that simple. Complications arise when trying to actually attribute agency to the cravings. Since it is the mother who feels the cravings and who can actually be seen to satisfy them it is assumed that she is the source. This is not in fact necessarily the case. Many people hold that it is the baby who is channelling its own cravings through the mother. This suggests that the child is not randomly influenced but is merely heightening tendencies and characteristics that are already there in a sort of manipulative self-determination. Some people say that the baby must have the food it wants while it is inside the stomach; this makes it strong [*manavady*] and prevents it from getting annoyed and miscarrying itself. So the baby already has a strong personality which is expressed in needs and desires that demand to be satisfied. Cravings are interpreted as a sign of the individuality of the baby. This individuality may even extend to acute selfishness: if a baby craves endless fattening foods it is recognised that it is putting the life of its mother in danger as its increased size will make for a difficult labour. The contested nature of cravings means that they express an important contradiction in mother-child relations. The fact that the agency is in doubt and can never be definitively attributed provides a dramatic example of the inseparability of the two; the potentially negative consequences for either party on the other hand illustrate an impossible divide and potential 'conflict'. Ideas of connection, co-operation, communication and competition are all contained in the idiom of craving.

9. This is also true for the period before birth. There are in forces outside the mother that may have an influence on the child. Although the baby has its own nature at this stage of its development it is particularly susceptible to change wrought by external forces and the dictates of a capricious environment. Thus the nature of a child could be touched by the close positioning of a strong substance. The mother is not thought to be a completely sealed object but is rather permeable and vulnerable. This means that external threats may slip through and penetrate the weak barrier of her skin; things outside her can be as dangerous and influential as ingested foods. Salt for example must be handled carefully; it should be carried separately in a slip of paper or a basket for if it

is tucked into a woman's wrap [*salova*] near her belly the baby will be effected and will always be crying after it is born. External threats are myriad and it is well nigh impossible to guard against them all. However some are so well known that they have become more than something you are advised to avoid, they have become official taboo [*fady*]. Pregnant women may not sit on a mortar [*dango*] because the baby's fontanel will be soft if she does; she must not sit on a pestle because it is too potently male etc. Some taboos [*fady*] are very instructive concerning the general nature of dangers. Much can be learned from the fact that a pregnant woman may not sit in a doorway. The reason for it is not that the place itself presents a risk but that the bad words of passers-by within earshot may wound the baby. As the proverb says: it is not the earth that is taboo but the mouths of people [*tsty ny tany no fady fa ny vavan'olo*]. The message is that many forces are constituted by the intentionality of people; in this case it is taboo for the baby to hear the words of strangers because the force inherent in these words uttered by fully formed people is too strong for an unborn child. The baby must be protected by treading a fine line. It must not be exposed to the dangers of strangers but equally it must not be smothered by the attentions of its parents. For the moment though the mother is both protector and possessor. Her protective and succouring role make her the owner of the child. She has done the work, she has worn herself out and made herself ill to bring a human being into the world. As producer and nurturer she initially gains the credit. However the baby is only temporarily taking advantage of the sheltered housing the mother provides; biding its time before it emerges into the world to make its own way. As soon as the protective role of the mother lessens the child starts to be removed from her sphere. Free of its dependence on a single mother figure the child begins to develop as a social as well as a human being.

10. During this visiting period immediately after the birth the mother should keep herself and the baby warm, wrapped up and enclosed. If possible a house within a house in the form of a thick mosquito net should be constructed and the mother and baby should remain in there, in the heat, close to the fire [*mifana*]. If there is no net she should lie next to the hearth enveloped in all the blankets available [*miampatana*]. Mother and baby remain locked in a womb like structure. Now that she has given birth she is no longer housing the baby; they are both housed in the same special and exclusive dwelling, sweating away the days together in union. Even when this period of ritual heating is over the baby should still always be kept in woollen knitted baby grows, covered with a warm hat and a special woven reed cover. There is a fear that if baby and mother are not hot they will become feverish [*manavy*]. The mother is obsessive about keeping the baby close to her at this time; the baby will always be in her arms, nursing or securely strapped to her back. When the mother is out and about it is often very difficult to see any sign of the baby encased and mummified under five layers of cloth; the mother looks like a hunchback travelling along under her load. Once you know that there is a baby inside all that material it is hard not to worry about it suffocating or expiring from heat exhaustion. The major point is that the mother and baby have been riven apart. Birth is too brutal and rapid a separation for both the mother and the child who have shared so much for so long. Their premature rupture has left them both vulnerable and open, especially to the harmful effects of the wind [*rivotra*]. The wind as the enemy symbolises the intrusion of the outside world into their fused and symbiotic relationship. Not until the mother has closed up and the baby has hardened up are either ready to go their separate ways. The required heat is associated with an absence of wind. Wind, although potentially dangerous as a carrier of peoples words, normally has positive connotations; it is associated with vitality and freshening and cleansing. A retreat from the wind is an escape from the normal world of social life with all its attendant dangers. Reintroduction to this world begins when the mother emerges from her den and is required to hand around her child for general inspection by her relatives. For someone who has been closely fused with her child for months this is a moment of great sacrifice. The destiny of the baby is changing hands from the mother to the wider social group.

11. Polygamy is rare but does occur, notably among *panjaka*. Ordinary men tend to have only one wife at a time; however, as serial monogamists who discard old wives in favour of younger ones, they may get through several in one lifetime.

12. One story tells of robbers travelling from *Majunga* to *Fort Dauphin*, over 2000 km, in less than a week.

13. "Sans boeuf pas de rite possible, pas de vie sociale possible" [Faublee 1954:85].

14. The clan representatives and the president of the *Dina* are hardly ever drawn from the pool of existing *panjaka*. The skills needed for the *Dina* jobs are thought to be of an entirely different nature to those required of

traditional leaders; therefore it is inappropriate to choose from amongst the same candidates and almost never occurs. *Dina* representatives do not have to be rich in cattle, but they do have to be cunning and to 'know how to sweet talk' [*mahay mamaha teny*]. Unlike traditional *panjaka*, *Dina* representatives are rarely trusted; in fact it is rumoured that many of the senior figures are famous ex-cattle-thieves themselves.

15. The charter does not exist as a piece of paper; however the rules, standard punishments, and agreed levels of compensation for different crimes are publicly recited at each general meeting.

16. One *ariary* is worth five francs malgaches. At this time there were about five thousand francs malgaches to one pound sterling. The maximum fine was thus about £45, a huge amount.

17. There was very little distinction between murder and manslaughter; when for example two men quarreled and one accidentally killed the other, the survivor himself had to be killed to satisfy people's idea of justice. This approach was said to be the only fair way because the dead man was unable to give his side of the story.

18. The *Dina* of the *Sahafatra* is made up of the following 'firaisa' [administrative districts]: *Vondrozo*, *Mahatsinjo*, *Mahazoarivo*, *Andaka*, *Ambohimana*, *Maropaika*, *Trotroky*, *Iabohazo*, *Tovogna*, *Mahazaza*, *Horombe*, *Ifatsy*, *Agnakara*, *Sovelo*. These names are recorded on the commemorative stone erected to the *Dina* in the village of *Analavaky*, in the territory of the *Masitafika* clan.

19. These are: the *Tevongo* (those from the *Apataka* region as well as those living around *Vondrozo*), *Masitafika*, *Vohilakatra*, *Lohanosy*, *Hova*, *Hovalahy*, *Antevatoke*, *Antsoro*, *Antemahatsinjo*, *Anterenana*, *Antanalambolo*. Before any debate can start [*atomboka*] a roll-call of all these clans must be completed.

20. This is in marked contrast to the traditional system in which *panjaka*, due to their seniority, can end a debate whenever they like.

21. The major *Dinas* in the region are: the *Dina* of the *Bara* to the west, based in *Maropaika* and *Ivohibe*; the *Dina* of the *Tanilo* (covering the *Antaisaka*, the *Zaramanampy* and several *Sahafatra* clans, namely the *Tsaretry*, *Tesonjo* and *Antemanara*) to the south, based in *Anilobe* and covering the regions of *Vaingaindrano* and *Midongy*; the *Dina* of the *Sahavoay* to the east; the *Dina* of the *Zafisoro* around *Tainganony*, also to the east; and the *Dina* of the *Antaifasy* around *Farafangana*. All the *Dinas* have different reputations: the *Bara* are soft, they do not kill robbers but merely fine them; the *Sahavoay* impose huge fines, thirty cows for a single theft; and the *Antaifasy* are very tough, burning robbers alive with petrol at a set location on a hillside.

22. The weapons people carried varied from antiquated rifles with corks jammed in the barrels to stop water entering, to machetes, to axes, to spears. The rifles were mostly carried for show as, even if they worked, ammunition was expensive and hard to come by.

23. One such dispute arose between the villages of *Tsaragisa* (clan *Tevongo*) and *Madiorano* (clan *Antsoro*). The two opposing parties were regarded as quarreling siblings [*roa tota*]. Each village blamed the other for losing the tracks. Only after extended mediation by the *Dina* of the *Sahafatra* (which argued that the villages should not fight [*ka miady!*] but should work together [*tokony hifanaraka*]) was it agreed that each village should pay half the compensation owing to the *Dina* of the *Tanilo*.

24. This last cow was referred to by the *Tanilo* as the 'washing of the spear' [*sasa-lefo*] suggesting that it atoned for the crime and allowed the fight to be forgotten.

25. The version of events presented here is designed to give a flavour of *Dina* debates, however, it is a gross oversimplification. Actual debates stretch out over several days; not only does everyone get their say, there is also a certain amount of gamesmanship and brinkmanship involved: in particular the defendants turn up late in the day to minimise the time they can be cross-examined and to wear out and frustrate the plaintiffs; as the afternoon wears on the defendants call off the discussion saying that it is dark [*mizi-be*] and that evening has come [*efa hariva ny andro*] thereby forcing the plaintiffs to stay another day away from home. These tactics are designed to soften up the plaintiffs, encouraging them to accept less. In this particular case the tactic worked in

one sense and backfired in another: the visitors became so tired that they eventually accepted a small number of low quality cows in order to get away; however they had been delayed so long that their 'vatsy' [food supplies] had run out. The President of the *Dina* of the *Sahafatra* was so ashamed [*menatra*] and angry [*vinitra*] that he forced the culpable villages (those that had lost the tracks), who had delayed payment on purpose, to pay 200 'kapaoky' [condensed milk tins] of rice to the guests in compensation [*faham-bahiny*]. Only once this was sorted out could the official handover of the compensatory cattle take place. The *Tanilo* paid 4000 ariary to show their appreciation to *Iaban'i Fano*, who then performed a blessing and recited the laws of the *Dina*. The *Tanilo* still could not leave until the next day as they had to register the cows with the administration in *Vondrozo* before departure. The paperwork sorted out *Iaban'i Fano* put pressure on one of the Chinese/Malagasy traders to provide a truck to take the *Tanilo* some of the way home. The truck having been successfully requisitioned the *Tanilo* elders piled on board and proceeded to leave town [*mirava*] escorted by their young warriors who blew wildly on their conch shells to celebrate the end of the campaign.

26. Professor *Zafy Albert* during our period of fieldwork.

Part II: the cult of nature

Part II of the thesis shows how the ‘culture of testing’ is not an abstract form but is predicated on the connection between man and the ‘environment’, a relationship which I call the ‘cult of nature’. It explains how the intimate involvement of man and ‘environment’ informs the ‘culture of testing’ and allows it to serve a powerful practical purpose: generating life and fertility for the people. The ‘cult of nature’ thus makes the ‘culture of testing’ meaningful, while the ‘culture of testing’ makes the ‘cult of nature’ possible. Chapter 6 explores how mythological tests of the past have coloured attitudes towards testing now; Chapter 7 analyses the relationship between man and the general ‘environment’ and describes how man uses this relationship to access the ‘force of nature’; Chapter 8 discusses how people ‘ground’ themselves in the land through particular funerary and commemorative practices.

Chapter 6

The changing and pervasive nature of tests and trials

In this chapter I shall trace the historical involvement of the people of *Sahafatra* with the land, from mythological past practise to contemporary culture. I intend to demonstrate how the idea of testing (oneself and each other) has not emerged out of nowhere but is the result of a particular cultural heritage: it is the tradition of combat with each other, and of confrontation and involvement with the land that makes the idea of testing *panjaka* so satisfying and relevant to the people of *Sahafatra*.

The clans that make-up *Sahafatra* think of their history as beginning with tests; the test of migrating to and inhabiting a strange land and the test of competing with the other clans to earn their right to stay there. It is these remembered trials [*tange*] that still set the tone of life in the region today. To understand the importance and nature of these tests we must appreciate that for the people of *Sahafatra* the land (or the general environment) is not passive but is rather an active force that must be constantly taken into account and manipulated in order for them to thrive. The ‘force of the environment’, which they refer to as ‘*Zanahary*’, must be tapped into in order to guarantee human fertility. It is with this in mind that we must consider how the people of *Sahafatra* imagine the first mythic arrivals.

Tests that are already given when you enter the world

At some point in the long distant past the land lay untouched [*tsy nisy olo*], in a pristine state, governed by its own natural laws [*lala-tany*] and unaffected by human intervention [*tsy namboarin’olo*]¹. Eventually the ancestors of the present inhabitants entered the scene [*ny raza avy an-davitra*]. At first they were trespassers [*tsy tompony*] in an alien place [*toera tsy fantany*]; they had to tread carefully [*mandeha moramora*] because the laws were not of their own making

and had to be learnt [*voatery mianatra ny lala-tany*]. When they arrived they were not accustomed to the land [*tsy zatra an-tany*] and the land was not accustomed to them [*sambay-tany*]. An accommodation had to be reached [cf Lienhardt 1961:33]: in part they accepted that they had to mould [*miova*] themselves to the land but they were also determined to colonise the place with the cultural baggage they brought with them [cf McKinnon 1991:63-106 on constituting new worlds]. In particular people carried with them the idea of descent, a concept defined by the image of children following the rules set by their fathers [*ny zanaka manaraka ny didy ny iabany*].

Descent encouraged people to orientate themselves to the land in a certain way; to make the baggage compatible and complementary with the surroundings. The abstract idea of descent was thus expressed through ordering and aligning people and objects not only with reference to themselves but also with reference to the general environment. Using cardinal directions (north, south, east, west) as an index, seniority and the moral order were literally mapped onto the landscape through the meaningful placement of houses in relation to each other. Senior houses (containing lineal ascendants) were built to the privileged and sacred north-east ² and junior houses (representing junior descendants) were to the south west.

The houses were not only oriented to the cardinal directions and to each other, they were also oriented to the dominant feature of the landscape, the forested escarpment. By a quirk of fate the escarpment that defines the western edge of the land of *Sahafatra* runs unerringly north-south. So descent (worked out through, and in, houses that are oriented north-south) and the most apparent manifestation of the 'land' (the north-south escarpment) were able to run parallel with each other. However this type of alignment only constituted a surface similarity and still left people 'on the outside' [*ivelany*]. Ancestors were concerned to develop 'deeper' relations with the land; they instigated connections to the land to make it commensurable and to create a link that could not be severed. The house, in particular, was used to mediate between people and their surroundings. Through fusing their houses to the land by nailing them into the earth (the main posts are all dug deep into the ground), making them represent the land, and also using them as a place to model the potent 'natural' processes of the environment (see next chapter), the ancestors began to have an active influence over the land. Houses thus came to connect the

living to the land in an active way.

Different means were used to achieve the same end using elements of the newly born and the dead: the umbilical cords [*foitra*] of babies were carefully positioned at strategic points in the landscape (see next chapter) and the bodies of the dead [*faty*] purposefully grouped [*tambatra*] in communal tombs within the earth (see final chapter). Through these additional techniques descent was in a sense plugged into the land, opening up an avenue of communication and potential transformation between the human and non-human worlds that allowed man began to become part of the ‘force of the environment’ [*Zanahary*].

These strategies were being operated at the same time by all the competing clans. Each clan was attempting to become the dominant force in the land not only through their own positive action but also by interfering with and spoiling [*manimba*] other clans’ settlement. This was achieved by raiding other clans and stealing the bodies of their *panjaka* [*fangalarana fatim-panjaka*] so that they could not become properly connected [*tsy tena fatora*] with the land . This state of inter-clan warfare [*adin-draza*] lasted until the French pacified the region. At this point the clans, at the insistence of the French, negotiated cross-cutting peace treaties and cooperative alliances with each other. These mutually agreed treaties were not registered in the form of laws (as we understand the term) but took a peculiar and particular Malagasy form, known as ‘*fanopa*’. Unlike normal laws, that only last as long as the system that created them stays in power, the ‘*fanopa*’ laws, generated from ancestral agreements, are not transitory but permanent. They were created at a moment in time but they stand forever [*tsy mety tapitra*].

The end of hostilities is often attributed to the mediation of outsiders (the French) but the means of maintaining the peace was an entirely Malagasy creation. Enforcement of the peace is not talked about with reference to the old colonial masters but with reference to the continuing power of the environment to ‘judge’ (without human intervention) contemporary transgressions of these ancestral laws. The ‘force of the environment’ [*Zanahary*] is said to see and injure those that go against the laws encoded within it [*mahita Zanahary, mahavoa*]. So as human beings are born into the world now they are entering an environment that, although still changing, has already been greatly influenced by their ancestors and in which some unchanging, perpetual ‘natural’

laws already exist.

'Fanopa' relationships in practice

'Fanopa' relationships between clans are the most pervasive residue of ancestral endeavour. These relationships were initiated by great men of the past who cemented alliances through the mutual sacrifice of cattle [cf Elli 1993:83 on similar 'vala valy' relationships among the Bara]. By ritually sacrificing to each other previously warring clans came to live in peace with one another and were said to be 'pifanopa', partners in a mutual cursing relationship.

'Fanopa' relationships are not thought to have existed forever; they were created at a certain point in time³: However their greatest use, and the way they are culturally conceived of now, was as a way to ally previously warring clans. Clan leaders sacrificed cattle to one another in a ceremony known as 'measuring each other up' [*mifamatra*] which transformed whole clans from opponents into quasi-kin, thereby guaranteeing an end to hostilities. Once the bargain was sealed the internecine fighting between the clans involved came to an end; not one drop of blood was allowed to be shed in anger from then on, on pain of dire punishment. By agreeing to be 'cursing partners' [*pifanopa*] the groups forbade themselves any violence directed towards each other. They were no longer allowed to fight and to kill but they were allowed to curse each other and utter 'bad words' [*teny ratsy*]. This is what it is to 'mifanopa'; it is 'to insult each other' [*mifanasaha*] and goad each other on to the offensive. By taunting others you are daring them to break the truce and thereby put themselves in mortal danger from 'divine' (ie not human) retribution; for it is the 'force of the environment' [*Zanahary*], not the ancestors, that polices this system.

The nature of 'opa'

An 'opa' is a curse, generally involving accusations of incest or wishing someone dead by violent means. It can include the saying of anything rude, blasphemous or inappropriate. 'Opa' are bad

words linked up with sex, honour and death. They take the form of insults and curses: ‘Mother-fucker!’ [*vady ny endrinao*]; ‘Sister-fucker!’ [*vady ny anakavinao*]; ‘Dead dog!’ [*amboa maty*]; ‘Vomit blood!’ [*mandoa ra*]; ‘Die tomorrow!’ [*maty maray*]; ‘Let you be struck down by lightning!’ [*vakiam-baratra*]; ‘Die!’ [*ho maty*]; ‘Let your liver rot!’ [*mantsy aty*]; ‘Let you be eaten by a crocodile!’ [*hanim-boay*].

People are ashamed to say ‘*opa*’ and therefore it is hard to find anyone to explain them. It is as if the words are bad in themselves; to an extent they can stand by themselves outside the intention of the speaker. This fear of contamination by the words makes people ashamed to say them even with a ‘clean heart’ [*madio fo*]. In theory if they are only joking there is no danger, but the fact that if spoken in earnest they give a ‘dirty heart’ [*maloto fo*] makes people nervous and wary. Words are like objects and weapons; they are definite, tangible and powerful even when not propelled by malicious intentionality. When you ask someone the meaning of a word, or how a word came to be, people look puzzled and confused. They have difficulty separating the word from the meaning attached to it; it is therefore hard for them to reduce it to a core meaning or to come up with an explanatory parallel. This idea is conveyed by the Malagasy term for reading, ‘*mamaky teny*’, which literally means to ‘break words’. It is as if you can only extract meaning from words by doing violence to them and taking them apart.

The fact that words are to an extent really ‘out there’ effects the ‘cursing relationship’ [*fanopa*]. ‘Cursing’ [*fanopa*] is about the control and regulation of anger and the potential violent urges stemming from that anger. Words are the key factor in this method of control. As I have previously explained when A is angry with B the anger actually moves from A to B [*mifindra toera*]. Anger is an agent in itself, that once released may get out of control and rebound back on you. The ‘cursing relationship’ [*fanopa*] allows you to talk the anger out. Keeping anger in is said to make you ill [*laha tsy mifanopa da mamparary*] but if you just let it out it transfers to another and promotes conflict. ‘Cursing relations’ [*fanopa*] are designed to allow bad words and the anger contained in them out, but under control so that neither does one fall ill nor does one risk violence. This behaviour can become everyday and constitutes a sort of working joking relationship; however it is a joking relationship that contains a real potential sting if it goes wrong.

What does a ‘cursing relationship’ [*fanopa*] do?

A ‘cursing relationship’ [*fanopa*] brings together more than one clan [*raza*]. People of one clan [*raza*] are not ‘cursing partners’ [*pifanopa*] to each other because they already share a set of expectations and obligations that are safeguarded by their own ancestors [*raza*] who will intervene and punish people if they act improperly towards each other. For different clans [*raza*], who do not share a common set of expectations and guardians, the ‘cursing relationship’ [*fanopa*] installs an idea of solidarity, mutual assistance and perpetual peace that is otherwise lacking. It provides a new arena where everyone must play by the same rules and where everyone will be judged according to those same rules by an impersonal, divine arbiter independent of any individual clan.

The other important feature of a ‘cursing relationship’ [*fanopa*] is its irreversibility and its general nature. One cannot go back on a ‘*fanopa*’ relationship; it is impossible to renounce it without bringing terrible misfortune and death on oneself, one’s family and one’s clan. This is because the institution was initiated by great men who, as representatives of their clans, implicated all their followers in any agreement that they made. It was not, however, just the followers alive at that moment in time who were implicated in the relationship but also all their descendants who are, as a consequence, now bound by the same laws. This is why there is no such thing as personal liability alone in a ‘cursing relationship’; a ‘*fanopa*’ relationship is a family and clan matter by default because it was instigated by commonly accepted clan ancestors. Thus, because a great *Masitafika* leader created a ‘cursing relationship’ [*fanopa*] with the *Vohilakatra* and the *Hova* in the past, now all *Masitafika* are ‘cursing partners’ [*pifanopa*] with all *Vohilakatra* and *Hova* for all time; similarly all *Tevongo* are ‘*pifanopa*’ with all *Tevatobe* and all *Antaisaka* forever and so on... This rule is very pervasive, so much so that husband and wife who come from clans that are ‘cursing partners’ [*pifanopa*] to each other may not hit each other, even in play. If one does the other should not complain or retaliate. ‘Cursing partners’ [*pifanopa*] should never take action against one another; for if there has been a transgression there will be a divinely engineered come-uppance [*mahita zanahary, mahavaoa*], the ‘force of the environment’ [*Zanahary*] seeing the ‘crime’ and harming the guilty party.

It is said that between ‘cursing partners’ [*pifanopa*] there should be no anger [*tsy misy havinirana*]. What this is really saying is that no anger should be admitted, displayed or acted upon outside set methods of expression; equally no offence should be taken by the recipient when such procedures are followed. A fine example of such successfully ritualised behaviour concerns the funeral of a senior *Masitafika panjaka*, a sensitive event by all accounts. A *Hova* man on hearing of the funeral made a special journey to pass by and re-emphasise the ‘cursing relationship’ [*fanopa*]. As he arrived at the funeral gathering, smiling broadly, he shouted gaily to the assembled people: "I hear there's a party!" [*misy fety!*], a blasphemous and provocative thing to say under normal funeral circumstances. However the audience, recognising their peculiar connection and approving of the licensed banter, burst into mirthful laughter at this daring display of wit. As the laughter died down a *Masitafika* man came up with an appropriate repartee: "Yes there's a party and now the witch has arrived!" [*ie, misy fety, tonga ny pamosavy*], at which everyone again collapsed into laughter.

‘Cursing partners’ [*pifanopa*] are still rivals, even dangerous rivals. However the threat they pose is no longer direct violence as such. Rather, through deliberate provocation, they tempt their partners to transgress against the ancestral laws. If either side in a ‘*fanopa*’ relationship gives in to this temptation, loses control and lashes out in retaliation at a perceived snub then they are thought to be doomed; they, and other members of their family, will be struck down dead on the spot [*maty sur place*]. The impersonal and deadly nature of the ‘*fanopa*’ system is best demonstrated by an example I give below.

A tragic story of the death of a *panjaka*

The people of *Andasibe* (clan *Tsaretry*) are ‘cursing partners’ [*mifanopa*] with the people of *Iabomary*. It so happened that a man from *Iabomary* repeatedly stole rice from the field of the *panjaka* who lived in *Andasibe*. As they were related as ‘*pifanopa*’ to each other it was generally agreed that the *panjaka* should not complain or ask for compensation. It is accepted that for ‘cursing partners’ [*pifanopa*] ideas of reciprocity and justice are suspended and that they may take liberties with one another; it was therefore thought inappropriate and unwise for the wronged

panjaka to take any action.

The problem was that the *panjaka* would not listen to the reasoned advice of his friends. He was tired of growing rice for someone else to reap the benefit of his labour. It did not seem fair to him, so, despite the urging of his fellow villagers to desist and consider the consequences of such a foolhardy course of action, he demanded compensation. As a result he was awarded one cow. However, as everyone had advised, it would have been better for him to have forgotten about the whole issue since the fact that he persisted and took possession of the cow turned out to be his undoing. In the popular view if he had just said that it did not matter [*tsy manahy*] and had simply cursed the thief [*mifanopa*] instead of demanding amends he would still be alive today.

As it was, though, the *panjaka* did not compromise and accepted the cow. A short time after he received this compensation he fell ill and died: it was said that he had been struck down by the 'fanopa' [*voa fanopa*]. Although the symptoms he suffered from were likened to a cough [*kohaka*] this was not what was thought to be responsible for his death: in the cultural conception of things he died because he broke an ancestral contract; the 'force of the environment' then punishing him for his temerity [*sazy omen'Zanahary*]. According to general opinion the *panjaka* was caught out by the 'cursing relationship' which, because it could not be undone or argued against, ultimately proved to be no joke. As a result of his transgression the cow was also effectively cursed (because it represented the betrayal of a sacred agreement) and could not be accepted by anyone involved. It was therefore decided that the cow, now a dangerous object, should be 'released into the wilds' [*atao joby*] to find its own way and be claimed by a group not implicated in the 'cursing relationship' [*fanopa*] and therefore safe from further harm.⁴

From the story it can be seen what a harsh system the 'fanopa' is and how the 'fanopa' system does not always dispense conventionally recognised justice. The person who has been gravely wronged is in as much danger as the wrong-doer himself. The death of the *panjaka* was, for example, recognised as tragic; it 'made people sad' [*mampalahelo*] because they thought of him as a good man who had been tricked into throwing away his life. The terrible fear of the 'fanopa' is also clearly demonstrated by the willingness of the *panjaka*'s clansmen to throw away the most prized of objects, a cow, rather than risk further displeasing the inhuman power that governs the

inter-clan treaties. It is clear then that the ‘cursing relationship’ [*fanopa*] is a sort of supra justice system, unalterable and beyond the realm of common sense. What is interesting is that to satisfy the rules of the ‘cursing relationship’ [*fanopa*] people have to act even more selflessly to one another than actual kin do. A real kin relationship involves give and take whereas a ‘*fanopa*’ relationship consists of hard and fast rules.

The consequence of ‘*fanopa*’ is to reify the relationships between clans. Although it brings clans together it also recognises essential difference between them. A ‘cursing relationship’ [*fanopa*] asserts that people were not kin and have had to be made to behave as kin artificially. This is why punishment for even minor transgressions is death; the means of regulation has to be harsh because there is no other bond between the involved parties to make them behave like kin. ‘Cursing partners’ [*pifanopa*] are expected to be like kin but the living out of the relationship never allows them to forget that they did not always regard each other as such and therefore in a sense are still not now. An example of this is provided by intermarriage between clans that are ‘*pifanopa*’. In this instance the quasi-kinship provided by the ‘cursing relationship’ is not enough to bridge the gap. The fact that the clans were enemies who fought in the past makes marriage between them impossible until a special sacrifice of a cow [*botro*] is completed to truly make them kin [*mampihava*]. This sacrifice is itself thought of as a test (this is the meaning of ‘*botro*’), a proof on top of an already existing quasi-proof that the clans are as one.

The ‘cursing relationships’ [*fanopa*] in operation in *Sahafatra* now are thought to have been instituted by great men of the past; their power became infused in the environment and their laws permanently inscribed in the land. The greatness of these men is still evident in the collections of standing stones [*orim-bato*] commemorating [*fahatsiarova*] them that litter the landscape today. The standing stones act as perpetual reminders of the great feats of the past and of the enduring power of the inter-clan laws, and their continuing existence encourages a certain degree of emulation now. Although it is universally recognised that it was the ancestors who introduced the first immutable tests, the ‘*fanopa*’, the people of today have taken it upon themselves to create and enter into their own contemporary versions also.

‘Testers’ [*fanange*]: the modern day equivalent to ‘cursing partners’ [*pifanopa*]

‘*Fanopa*’ have been fixed for all time; they are imagined as a result of a golden age of ancestral power. ‘*Fanange*’ by contrast are personal relationships entered into voluntarily by pairs of people now [cf Elli 1993:82]. To become ‘*fanange*’ with someone is to take on the role of a sort of blood brother to a person [cf Thomas 1996:36]. In theory both the parties involved hold a spear between them, cut themselves with a razorblade and drink a spoonful of each others blood. This makes them kin [*pihava*] although only in a certain sense as they still cannot enter each others tombs when they die.

The idea of the ‘*fanange*’ relationship stems from the general interest in testing or trial by ordeal. The root of the word is ‘*tangena*’ [*tange*] which is the name of the tree whose bitter fruit used to be used for trial by ordeal in some parts of the island and which has now come (in the land of *Sahafatra*) to represent any sort of supernaturally judged test. The word [*tange*] has been turned into its reciprocal [*fanange*] to show how two people are mutually and perpetually testing each other. The test is overseen by the ‘force of the environment’ [*Zanahary*] which ‘judges’ the actions of the people and punishes them and their kin accordingly; nothing goes unseen so there is no escaping the consequences of one’s actions.

The actual rules of the testing relationship are straightforward and demanding: in theory a ‘*fanange*’ can ask anything of his partner whether it be a favour, a loan of money or use of his wife [cf Elli 1993:82-87]. The open ended nature of the possible requests of a partner makes it imperative that one choose very carefully; for once a ‘*fanange*’ has asked his partner for something it cannot be refused. To refuse a ‘*fanange*’ anything is regarded as a betrayal of the original oaths; it is thought of as ‘turning against someone’ [*mivadika*] and is unacceptable. This is why I have decided to translate ‘*pifanange*’ (the people who practise a ‘*fanange*’ relationship) as ‘testers’, meaning people who test each other to the limit. To be in a ‘*fanange*’ relationship is thus to commit oneself to a type of super-reciprocity where one does not count the cost. If a ‘tester’ counts the cost then the ‘tester’ has failed and he⁵ and his family are certainly done for. For these reasons people who are not approximate equals should not become ‘testers’ [*fanange*]; there would be too much of an imbalance. I myself was warned not to enter into such a

relationship as it would leave me open to excessive demands. Likewise the Chinese/Malagasy shop-owners would not consider compromising themselves by forming such an alliance.

The ‘testing relationship’ [*fanange*] entails a superhuman trial because it involves being prepared to share everything. Any wrong perpetrated by either partner will be seen and dealt with by higher forces. In the past particular ‘*tange*’ [trials] (different to now) were done if the truth needed to be revealed over a contentious issue. For example people would be required to tell their version of what happened with earth on their head [*mitatao tany*] risking mortal injury from its power if they strayed from the truth; alternatively bones from the tomb would be used as a truth detector; or it would be demanded that someone swam a crocodile infested river to see if they survived. Nowadays ‘*tange*’ [trials by ordeal] still happen but the format has changed; people invite divine judgement upon themselves by drinking rum in front of a communally erected; sanctified standing stone ⁶.

The appeal of ‘testing relationships’ [*fanange*]

The ‘testing relationship’ [*fanange*] provides a satisfying approach to life because it appeals to a code of honour removed from human agency and ruled over by a greater force. As a supra-human justice system the ‘*fanange*’, like the ‘*fanopa*’, is able to arbitrate over events that would otherwise seem completely ungovernable. It allows people to forge relationships of trust without reference to anyone else and creates relationships of equality that do not recognise the privilege of one person over another. The ‘testing relationship’ [*fanange*] forms bonded pairs who can never cut off their relationship to one another however much their life-paths may diverge; a permanent and intractable relationship is generated with reference to the land. This is perhaps why ‘*fanange*’ relationships are used by strangers to incorporate themselves and by people of *Sahafatra* to incorporate strangers. Strangers [*vahiny*] in particular enter into these relationships to get access to land, by becoming ‘testers’ [*pifanange*] with the masters of the land [*tompontany*]. Kin are already caught in a web of obligations directed towards each other; they already face the prospect of ancestral anger if they neglect them. Strangers on the other hand have to prove themselves to be kin; like all types of converts they must show themselves to be

as worthy as those who automatically have a right to that status.

The institution of '*fanange*' provides artificial means to make someone kin, or more accurately to make two people kin to each other. The sanctions for misconduct in this relationship are extreme because the pair involved have no previous claims on each other. Kin on the other hand do not require such sanctions; their loyalty should not be in question. If they behave in such a way as to make it questionable they face the threat of disownment; of being expelled from their kin group and excluded from the communal tomb.

For 'testers' [*fanange*] there is a very fine line between sharing and stealing. Of course a 'tester' should be able to have whatever he wants from his partner, but if he takes it from behind his back or puts his partner in a position whereby he finds himself in serious trouble then the taker himself could be said to have 'turned' [*mtvadika*]. It is this grey area of uncertainty that gives the '*fanange*' relationship its piquancy: one must know just how far to push without pushing too far. No living man can know how far is too far, so anyone involved in such a relationship is living on the edge. For those that are divinely judged to have transgressed the punishment is truly awful. Not only will the transgressor himself be struck down dead, but seven of his close kin will also be claimed, a phenomenon known as '*maty fito*'. In one case a man was caught stealing bananas from his 'tester' [*fanange*]. People were astonished at the stupidity of his behaviour; why risk his own life and that of his family over a bunch of bananas? In this case the official punishment he received was negligible, mainly because the general consensus was that he had already brought imminent disaster on himself by betraying his '*fanange*'.

This story brings out an important aspect of the local psyche: the general population do not find punishment through imprisonment or beating to be a satisfactory solution to a problem. In native thought the idea of prison is a joke. Not only is it an alien concept that is not customary, it is also totally impractical and ineffectual. One informant, explaining the importance of '*fanange*' relationships, said that there was no such thing as imprisonment [*tsy misy gadra*]; he mimed blowing a house down (like in the story of the big, bad wolf) and the prison doors swinging open, implying that there is simply nothing to keep one in. I think what he was trying to say was that prisons do not work (because one can bribe one's way out for a pittance) and that they are not in

accordance with local ideas of justice. The idea of an ongoing trial by ordeal, judged divinely is thought to be more appealing and effective than a criminal trial leading to an essentially meaningless custodial sentence. This type of morality is based on an assumed divine omniscience activated by a man-made interpersonal contract assured by the ancestors. To the average man this is preferable to the lottery of human decision-making based on limited knowledge and a biased outlook. In the superhuman trial system everything should be shared; it opens up a whole new arena of reciprocal action where any wrong perpetrated by a partner will be seen and dealt with outside the realm of human agency. The test is in perpetuity and inescapable.

Learning to cope with testing relationships: socialisation

The ability to cope with such demanding testing relationships is an acquired skill. The importance and pervasiveness of tests is recognised by parents who try and prepare their children by socialising them in a particular way. Children are taught to react to teasing in a certain way so that they will be able to face up to more serious tests later in life. Children are not born helpless to face these tests. It is generally recognised that they already have a very strong will when they are inside the mother's belly. What socialisation is designed to do is to initially protect and encourage this nature before then toughening it up.

Babies are given huge amounts of attention, both personal and general, when they are small. They are strapped on backs, they are covered up, dressed, cradled, breast fed, talked and sung to; they are humoured, allowed to lounge next to the mother in the centre of the house; they are spoiled, handed round to all the relatives and manage to milk up all the attention. However when another baby is born the new baby suddenly takes priority and precedence over the previous child. The older child, who has been made to feel very secure and loved up until this point, suddenly has this privilege taken away; after having been intensively cared for it is left to its own devices, in a sense abandoned, and has to be looked after by the other children. Children tend to look very lost at this stage and are very quiet and shy. Their misery is not respected, however, but is rather heightened by the commencement of teasing in earnest.

It is commonly believed that at this stage of maturation children should be prepared to start to grow up; consequently they are teased [*misangisangy ratsy*], tormented and forced to face the worst horrors they can imagine. For example, when we were present children were always told to 'look at the strange foreigners in the house' even if it frightened them and made them cry. There was often no mercy until the tears came; the children were threatened with being packed off with us, sold to us or even eaten by us. Only when it was finally all too much and the tears were rolling down, accompanied by wails of terror, did the adults relent and provide limited comfort. It was as if when the point had been made, the episode was over and life could get back to normal.

What is this type of teasing behaviour intended to achieve? It is teaching children to respond in a certain way, hardening them up for the tests and trials ahead. The proper reaction to teasing is not to cry or to lose your temper, but is to simply deny the validity of the teasing, ignoring and refusing to rise to the taunt and the implied threat of something unpleasant associated with it. The first response to teasing is to cry; the next development is the flat out refusal to accept the teasing or to play the game. As I have already pointed out almost the first word a child seems to learn is '*malay*' which basically expresses non-agreement and a refusal to comply. It is a coverall word meaning "Can't! Shan't! Won't!", that must be rapidly learnt as a necessary response to the barrage of teasing one inevitably receives. Then later on maybe a child should learn to ignore the teasing altogether as if it wasn't actually there at all; and finally and most desirably will master the correct and best reaction to teasing which is to tease back. This learning curve is obviously a long and painful process but is essential to growing up and interacting with your peers; by the time you are a young man accepting teasing and knowing how to tease back should be second nature. The world becomes a very funny place.

The nature of teasing

Teasing and words in general are the means of maintaining discipline within the household. Children quickly develop an acute sense of shame which can be activated by the parents if the child steps out of line. It is therefore very rare for children to be beaten for the simple reason that

it is not seen as necessary. Teasing is a strange demonstration of love within the family, eventually providing and enabling a strategy that will be useful for the children throughout their lives. Mastering teasing is essential since by learning about teasing within the confines of the family one safely learns the way of expressing bonds and quasi kinship connections with outsiders, rivals and even potential enemies.

Teasing is an important characteristic of everyday life that gives a clue to why testing relationships are so valued⁷. Teasing babies, boys in particular, is thought to make them stronger and more independent; it is a balance of hardening them up and getting them in line. A young boy's mother's brother, known as his 'Male Mother' [*endrilahy*], should play a particularly prominent role in the teasing of his 'Sister's Son' [*zanak'anakavy*]; he helps to develop the highly personal and individual character of the child at the same time as impressing upon him the allegiance he owes to his 'male mother'. A popular way of expressing this was to threaten to cut the ear of the 'sister's son' with scissors treating the child in the same way as one would a newly acquired cow.

As boys get older turning into young men they become involved in the joking relationships with their sisters', and classificatory sisters', husbands [cf Elli 1993:68], who are known as their 'male wives' [*valilahy*]. 'Male wives' [*pivalilahy*] are ideal for this sparring because they are slightly ambiguously positioned age-mates and contemporaries: they are not from the same Big-House but they are allies through marriage. This semi-institutionalised bantering forms an important part of growing up; learning how to deliver half joking insults [*misangisangy ratsy, misoma iaho*] at the appropriate moment and with appropriate people takes skill. The delivery of these mock hard words [*teny mahery*] provides practice for more demanding reciprocal relationships (such as 'fanopa' and 'fanange') based on the same model. 'Pivalilahy' should 'tease each other' [*misoma*] but should never get angry [*tsy mety vinitra*] or fight [*tsy mety miady*]. If things are getting out of hand they should be separated by their fellows [*sarahina*] as degeneration into a brawl is seriously frowned upon. The relationship is remarkably similar to that of the 'fanange', about which I have already talked, except for the fact that misdemeanours are not automatically judged and punished by the ancestors.

Another type of teasing commonly found is that surrounding the idea of hospitality. Often people will enter your house unexpectedly and call out loudly: "So, where's the food then?" [*aia ny masaky*], before rifling through the shopping basket to see what there is and marching into the kitchen to see what's cooking on the fire. This cheeky demand is testing one's willingness and ability to give without a moments notice. Again, like the '*pivalilahy*' relationship, it is taken lightheartedly. However this lightheartedness hides the serious dimensions of the request.

Tests as a cultural system

I have talked about socialisation for survival, about how people are brought up to test each other and to survive tests themselves. I have discussed tests, both old and new, in order to show what an important part of *Sahafatra* society they are. However it is not just the existence and pervasiveness of the tests that is important, it is also their particular nature. What makes the tests remarkable is that they are all informed by beliefs in the power of the 'environment' to affect human affairs. The tests are not judged by humans but by more intangible forces.

The impersonal arbitration of the tests is something the clans have in common. They do not share the same ancestors but they do share the same 'environment'. It is their involvement with the 'environment' that mutually implicates them with each other. It is the perception of the 'environment' as an active force, albeit one already manipulated by the ancestors, that colours people's view of life today. The fact that old enmities between clans have been transformed into supernatural tests built into the 'environment' has major implications. Although open conflict has been brought under control this has come at a price; the price is that life is, and will always remain, a test. This is because the tests do not have to be recreated each generation; they are already out there, written into the landscape. Recognition of this state of affairs influences the *Sahafatra* approach to life. However this is not the end of the story. As we have already noted new tests have been devised to test men who rule over others. These tests are not purely gratuitous but also serve a purpose, generating fertility/blessing. These tests, like the ones outlined in this chapter, are based on the connection of people to the 'environment'.

Endnotes

1. This narrative is not a fixed story that it is regularly recounted but is rather my piecing together of snippets and fragments of conversation and commentary on the subject. The consistency of informants' attitudes to the first arrival of their ancestors in the region is my justification for constructing and presenting a coherent story.

2. People were not explicit as to why the north-east is sacred, apart from to say that it is the 'corner of the ancestors' [*joron-draza*]. Unlike in other parts of the island there is no tradition of the ancestors originally heralding from across the ocean to the east; in fact most of the currently remembered ancestors of the clans that constitute *Sahafatra* are said to come from the west. In some practical ways, however, the north-east has easily understandable positive connotations: the sun rises in the east and (since Madagascar is south of the equator) moves across the northern aspect of the sky. The north-east corner thus represents birth and warmth.

3. Different informants have slightly different versions of how the first mythical '*fanopa*' relationship came about. However there is only one basic sort of 'Just So Story', outlined below, which was consistently given by informants. 'A long time ago there was a man who went to look for honey in the forest. He spotted a bees nest high up in a tree and climbed a creeper/vine to get the honey. When he reached the top all the branches round him snapped off along with the creeper he had used to ascend. He could not get down and was stuck there for three days getting increasingly hungry. On the fourth day another man happened to pass by in order to fetch some clothes and spotted the man up in the tree. He asked him what he was doing there and the man explained his predicament. The man who had gone to fetch his clothes decided to cut down some wood and construct a ladder. When the ladder was finished the trapped man was able to descend to the ground and was saved. The two men jointly decided that they should ally themselves. They each went off to collect a cow and returned to the same spot. At this spot they 'measured themselves up against one another' [*mifamatra*] by each killing the others cow and drinking its blood. An enduring contract was made committing them to mutual loyalty. If one dropped so much as a needle the other must not steal it or hoard it but must return it straightaway to its rightful owner'. The story of the first '*fanopa*' is about a pact between individuals, but it was in fact most commonly used to ally clans. The story presents rather a rosy picture of the relationship; it presents a spontaneous agreement based on the voluntary giving of help and the gratitude of the person receiving that help when most of the '*fanopa*' relationships were made between warring clans, hostile to each other. The story also gives no hint of the eternal nature of the contract or of the terrible punishment (death) awaiting either side should they renege on the deal.

4. I recount below two other short stories about '*fanopa*' relationships.

The wood-cutters: two men who were '*fanopa*' went together to the forest to cut wood for building houses. Both men worked until evening and the light was fading; all the wood they needed was cut and they went home to their houses intending to pick up the wood at another time. In the middle of the night one of the men called another friend, went to the place where the wood was stacked and with his help took away all the best pieces. In the morning the other cutter returned to the stack and was astonished to find only the bad and twisted pieces left. He went in fury to the house of his friend and asked why he had taken the best for himself. The two '*fanopa*' argued and could not agree. Eventually the tricked cutter went home; by the time he had reached his house his '*fanopa*', the wood stealer, had already died.

The rice-meal: a man's rice field was spoilt by his '*fanopa*'. He did not insist that the rice be replaced but rather that it be replanted. When the '*pifanopa*' was replanting the field he brought his own food and cooked a meal. He did not finish the meal and the owner of the field ate the residue. A short while later the owner of the field died.

5. 'Testers' [*pifanange*] are almost always men.

6. Here I give an account of a contemporary trial by ordeal [*tange*]. In some cases it is necessary to have a 'trial by ordeal' [*tange*] that involves a whole clan. Below I give an example where an unknown member of the community betrayed his fellows by informing on them about a cattle theft to another clan, causing shame,

embarrassment and additional crippling fines from the *Dina*. The betrayal led to the need to perform a ‘*tange*’ in order to root out the culprit, clinically prove his guilt and deliver the ultimate punishment. Whoever informed was regarded as a witch [*pamosavy*], a person so antisocial that if the test found them guilty they would be struck down dead. The ‘*tange*’ in fact also made to cover previous crimes, such as the original theft of the cattle, and therefore provided a general cleansing. The first step was to decide who should do the trial. There was a long argument over who should do the test. Someone remembered a previous incident where an illegal rum [*toaka*] seller was informed on to the gendarmes; the informer had actually got his child to write the letter for him making it impossible to compare the handwriting in order to find the culprit. As the current instance also involved a letter people wondered whether children should do the test as well. After much discussion it was agreed that a ‘*tange*’ would detect the spirit of guilt and would therefore get to the bottom of the matter without the children having to be tested. So it was decided that all adults responsible for their actions, every man or woman over 18, should do the trial. The theoretical procedure to be followed was then quite straightforward. Rum [*toaka*] was to be drunk by all the suspects at the seat of the crime in front of the sacred stone that represented the unity and commitment of all the clan members to each other. For the innocent nothing bad would happen but for the guilty one of two things would happen: either the rum [*toaka*] would be like poison for them and they would fall ill or die; or they would be revealed as guilty by a bird hovering around their head, ‘dancing’ [*mandihy*] while they drank. (The trial by ordeal should thus ideally involve judgement and punishment). The ordeal itself involved the whole clan coming together. When all the group had assembled the senior *panjaka*, seated under an umbrella held by his Eye of the Water [*mason-drano*], did a blessing [*tata*] calling all the powers that be. He invoked all the senior *Masitafika* ancestors, ‘*Zanahary*’ to the east, west, north and south, the powerful earth [*tany masy*] and the powerful sacred stone [*vato masy*]. The *panjaka* explained the scenario to these powers and asked them to strike down the wrongdoer and avenge the betrayal of the *Masitafika*. Everyone then crowded around the open area where the trial was to take place. One by one everyone was required to stand up, announce their intention to approach the stone, make a respectful crouching approach, squat down on haunches or knees, remove their hat and do the trial. Once they had positioned themselves in front of the sacred stone they intoned the correct formulaic words which had been decided in advance; if they had trouble remembering them a senior man prompted until they got it right. The phraseology that those doing the trial used can be divided into three stages. In the first stage they did a blessing [*tata*], identifying themselves [*Masitafika iaho*] and calling on all the forces: creation, the strong earth and the powerful stone they had erected together [*zanahary ambony, tany masy ambany, vato masy namboarantsika*]. In the second stage they admitted their guilt concerning their offence. For example they said "It was I who wrote the letter..."; "it was I who offered the cows..."; "I don't know how to write but I sent a messenger to inform on us..." etc. This is known as ‘*manitsaka-tena*’ which means to trample on oneself, in other words to ritually admit to the transgression even if one did not commit it. The third stage involved calling down punishment and curses on oneself. "I want to drink this stone" [*te-inomina ity vato ity*] they said and then chose one of many possible self damnations: ‘Let me die today!’ [*Maty androany!*]; ‘Let this rum be poison!’ [*Poisin ity toaka ity!*]; ‘Let me be killed here!’ [*Vonoina etoa!*]; ‘Take me now!’ [*Alay! Mangala!*]; ‘May my head be broken!’ [*Vaky loha!*]. Then they drank three spoonfuls of rum [*toaka*] from a cuvette and smeared an extra spoonful over their head. (There was much laughter when all the balding people did this and the rum [*toaka*] dribbled into their eyes). After completing this people returned to their place, grouped according to towns so that absentees could be easily spotted. Everyone in turn admitted their guilt the theory being that only the true perpetrator would be struck down. The admissions of guilt caused much laughter as for some people they were patently ridiculous. Despite the laughter most people were trembling and their voices were shaking as they asked to be struck down. There was more nervous laughter as birds flew across and as chickens and geese were shooed away (domesticated birds are a nuisance only and cannot be birds of ill omen). At the end of the trial which took place on a Friday evening it had to be decided how long the ‘*tange*’ would last. It was agreed that anyone who died before Sunday night would be said to be guilty, struck down [*voa ny tange*]. In this case the body would not be allowed to be buried [*tsy azo ariana*] until the family had paid a substantial fine. Illness after Sunday would be regarded as straightforward illness [*areti-avao*]. In fact the time expired without a definite result; the deadline was reached and no one was dead. Some Christians [*pivavaka*] had however refused to do the ‘*tange*’ with rum [*toaka*] because this offended their sensibilities; instead they swore over the bible. This caused much controversy and led to them becoming the primary suspects when no-one else was caught out.

7. In order to understand teasing properly it must be placed in the context of growing up which involves peers, competitors and sex-segregation. In a sense the children are cast out from the shelter of the maternal umbrella very early. One by one they leave the world of the mother and enter into a sort of special community of children. Children are basically expected to amuse themselves, only gradually being introduced to the household tasks. Children and siblings normally go round in a gang looking after and fighting with each other. The girls take on the role of mother as well as sister to their brothers. Girls take up mothering very young nursing surrogate dolls (maybe a washing brush) until they get a chance to handle the real thing; then they care for their baby brothers and sisters with a will, replacing the real mother who is occupied with the most recent arrival. Young girls do not like to be deprived of the chance to share in the rearing of a new born baby in the family; one girl got hysterically upset, screaming because she was not allowed to accompany her elder sister and her first born away from the village. Girls are very often chronically shy until they have given birth themselves; then they take on a new sense of authority and suddenly become more confident, sometimes even bossy, shameless and loud. Giving birth, having children and caring for children and family seems to be the defining objective for most women in the land of *Sahafatra*. This overriding desire from the start of their lives means that women have a more constant timeless role than men. Sisters and mothers are merged in a way that brothers and fathers never are. The idea of being a woman starts young whereas that of being a man is a distant prospect for a young boy; he knows he must pass many tests to achieve that status. The life-paths of boys and girls separate early on. Although they are not physically kept apart the conceptual segregation of sexes is soon readily apparent. Boys may also care for their younger siblings but this is a very temporary role, a stop-gap and dead-end alley that leads nowhere. Young boys will run errands for their parents but otherwise they have quite an aimless life. If they are lucky they will be chosen to be a herd-boy, minding the family cattle on the hillsides and accompanying them to fresh pasture and water; this gives them confidence and an early taste of autonomy and independence. Otherwise they remain as onlookers until they are allowed to start participating in activities associated with wild young men [*panabaka*] such as the trampling of the rice paddies; funeral work; undertaking long journeys etc. Boys are often painfully shy and withdrawn until they manage to start to successfully emulate their childhood heroes, the warrior '*panabaka*'. Girls are automatically little women, they are involved in the world of women from the word go. They join a community of sex. Boys on the other hand have no automatic entry into the world of men; they are dropped into a world of age amongst brothers, peers, age-mates and contemporaries. Boys will progress together through life intensely aware of their changing role and their relative position/status with regard to their fellows. To be put in a world of peers is to foster an idea of competition right from the start. The constitution of a man's life can be divided into the age-sets he will pass through: red-baby [*zaza-mena*]; child [*zaza*]; overgrown suckler of mother's milk [*be-minono*]; child worker [*zaza-marô*]; warrior [*panabaka*]; older brother of youth [*zoki-zatovo*]; one of many responsibilities [*be atsÿ*]; leader [*panjaka*]; old man [*rangahy*]. Each stage involves a change in direction; it involves being judged by different criteria to those previously used and on earning the new status through appropriate behaviour. The system allows plenty of opportunity to measure yourself against your fellows. In fact the system could not exist as such if people did not compare themselves because for many of the transitions there is no single defining moment that captures the change.

Chapter 7

Creation [*zanahary*] and the creation of fertility

In the early chapters I talked about how people believed the land was settled. I now intend to review this with the aim of understanding people's current outlook on the land. The most important point to remember is that all the people who now count themselves as *Sahafatra* view themselves as migrant settlers [*olo avy an-davitra*]. None of the clans now resident in the area claim to be autochthonous [*tsy nisy olo taloha*]. It is the popular belief that when the original small familial groups arrived about 180 years ago the land was empty [*foana*] and uncultivated [*tsy nambole*]. The area was virgin territory [*tany malalaka*]; full of potential, but at that time bare and untouched. It is described as a place without food [*tsy'sy hany*], where people went hungry [*mosare*] because there were no rice paddies [*tsy'sy tani-kosy*].

This myth of arrival shared by the clans has major implications. Most obviously it asserts that everything of value that exists today has been created since the first pioneers. It asserts that a combination of human energy/endeavour and the immense potential of the particular environmental setting has brought the land to fruition. People are proud of how they and their ancestors have, as they see it, 'brought the land to life' [*namelona tany*]. However they recognise that they are still poor [*mbola mahantra*], that their children fall ill and die [*mbola misy areti mahafaty anakay*], and that there is much work still to do in order to remedy the situation [*miasa sinitra!*]. There are two lessons to be learnt from this story: that the land of *Sahafatra* is a good place to live because it is fertile; and that people have not yet realised the full potential of the land.

The first lesson underlines people's enduring commitment to the area. The second lesson helps explain people's pre-occupation with how to get the most out of the land. It is the idea of 'getting the most out of the land' [*mahamokatra tany*] that I am interested in developing. By 'getting the most out of the land' [*mahamokatra tany*] I do not simply mean working harder, planting more

crops and improving farming techniques etc. I mean harnessing the total force of the environment for the benefit of the human population. In order to understand this it is necessary to introduce the concept of ‘*Zanahary*’.

‘*Zanahary*’ is the local term for what we might crudely term the ‘environment’¹. It is all creation, the orientation to be found in everything, and the animating force that makes everything active [cf Errington 1989:35 for a similar southeast Asian view of how “cosmic energy suffuses and animates the world”]. ‘*Zanahary*’ is of the same order as the amoral force of ‘Divinity’ described by Lienhardt, the ‘Divinity’ which not only provides the gifts of children and cattle to the Dinka [Lienhardt 1961:23] but which also strikes them down. ‘*Zanahary*’, however, is in no sense removed from the earth and the realm of men as ‘Divinity’ is (as a consequence of the severing of the rope connecting Earth and Sky recounted in Dinka mythology); ‘*Zanahary*’ is therefore more contiguous with man than Lienhardt’s ‘Divinity’ and more systematic.

The relationship between the people of *Sahafatra* and ‘*Zanahary*’ is similar to the relationship between the Mongolians and their environment described by Humphrey:

“The Mongols ... move within a space and environment where some kind of pastoral life is possible and ‘in-habit’ it. That is to say, they let it pervade them and their herds, influencing where they settle, when they move, and what kinds of animals they keep. However, this is not a pre-reflective or spontaneous existence, but one recognising human choice and agencies, which are conceived as interrelated with and subordinated to the agencies attributed to entities in the land” [Humphrey 1995:135].

The major difference in strategy between the Mongols and the people of *Sahafatra* is that the latter are more pro-active in their attempts to control the land compared to the former who prefer to adapt to it. This is a necessary difference for the force of ‘*Zanahary*’ governs the world, and for people to thrive they must be able to manipulate [*mampiasa*] ‘*Zanahary*’ to their own ends. Manipulating ‘*Zanahary*’ is however problematic because ‘*Zanahary*’ is largely intangible [*tsy henon’olo, tsy hitan’olo*] and unknowable [*tsy afaka mahafantatra*]. People try and get round

this in two key ways: by appeasing ‘*Zanahary*’ and appealing to ‘*Zanahary*’ through sacrifices [*manome aomby*]; and by artificially breaking down ‘*Zanahary*’ into a system of elements [*mianatra mikasika Zanahary*] so that, using past experience as a guide, they can approximately predict whether certain combinations of elements will have a positive or negative effect.

The most profound example of a successful combination is the violent mixing of earth and water [*afangaro ny tany sy ny rano*] by cattle driven on by young men in the rice paddy. For the people of *Sahafatra*, committed wet-rice farmers, this is the ultimate life-giving [*mahavelo*] combination. There can be no doubts as to the beneficial effects of this mixing as it prepares the land for rice planting, and culminates in the harvesting of rice, the most vital and loved of all staples [*vary tian'olo*]. It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of this reaction in the psyche of the local people. Rice simply is life: most of ones life is dedicated to growing it, processing it, cooking it and eating it (as well as buying and selling it). When we explained to our friends that we did not grow rice in England they looked at us with pity and amazement: without rice, it seems, life is hardly worth living.

The reaction of earth and water (brought about by cattle goaded on by young men) is the prime example of two elements being combined to produce a beneficial effect. It is the exemplary life-giving reaction and is therefore said to be particularly ‘*masy*’. The word ‘*masy*’ conveys the idea of something powerful, potent and fertile. Although it is a highly charged concept it is not complexly elaborated, remaining instead very general and inexplicit; things either are, or are not, ‘*masy*’. The reaction of earth and water is thus simply said to be ‘*masy*’; it is the prime manifestation of the immense power of ‘*Zanahary*’, and a concrete exemplar of an abstract concept.

What this chapter will try and show is how the people of *Sahafatra* are so convinced by the power of this reaction that they have contrived to recreate it in human terms in order to generate additional ‘secondary blessing’ for themselves. This ‘secondary blessing’ is achieved by connecting the fertility of people with the fertility of the land, and by equating rice cultivation with life. Although this connection and this equation seem unlikely at first glance, to the actors themselves they are the most ‘natural’ things in the world. I argue this with confidence because



Rice paddies in the countryside (top); rice granary in a village (bottom).

the life-cycle of human beings and the life-cycle of rice are thought of as the same type of process: rice is so like human beings that it, also, is said to 'become pregnant' [*be vohoky*] and 'give birth' [*miteraka*]. The generation of 'secondary blessing' is not some surface performance but forms the central theme around which the people of *Sahafatra* choose their most senior rulers. The intention to access the power of 'Zanahary' has deeply influenced the shaping of the structure of authority in the land of *Sahafatra*.

How is it possible to create fertility: alternative sources of blessing

The thesis being put forward that blessing is being accessed outside of the ancestral cult rests on the fact that there is an alternative source of blessing to be found in the first place. In order to demonstrate that there is I intend to properly introduce the concept of 'Zanahary', a force of nature that can be tapped into and manipulated by man to serve his own ends.

Crudely put 'Zanahary' is the sum total of everything that goes to make up the environment in which man is living, the organisation of the elements within it, the code that governs how the different elements that comprise it interact, and the force behind the running of the whole thing. 'Zanahary' is all creation (and the master-plan embedded in it) and is consequently the most powerful force that exists in the *Sahafatra* cosmos. What makes 'Zanahary' particularly interesting and complex is its inclusion of man. As a conscious actor man is both inside and outside the system at the same time. In one sense he is inextricably part of the 'Zanahary' system (to the extent that he is constituted and determined by it [*ny toetran'olo omen 'Zanahary*]); in another sense however he is removed from it as an onlooker/observer who is trying to understand and manipulate [*mampiasa*] 'Zanahary' for his own benefit, advancement and well-being. The attempts by man to manipulate 'Zanahary' can all too easily give the impression that 'Zanahary' is a god-like figure appealed to by him. This misconceived interpretation is reinforced by the confusion between 'Andriamanitra' (the Christian God) and 'Zanahary'. For us it is important not to mistake the two radically different ideas, one a recent alien importation, and the other the cornerstone of a more traditional world-view. In order to make this difference clear I dedicate a section to developing the nature of 'Zanahary' as the

locals perceive it.

‘Zanahary’: creator or creation

In a perceptive but limited account of the religious practices of the ‘East Coast Culture Area’, written in 1928, Linton introduces some of the problems encountered when trying to describe ‘Zanahary’:

“This is the name given to a power above the ancestors, from whom they derive their powers. In this region *Zanahary* is poorly personified and the natives are not sure if he is one or many. Some claim that every gens, person, and even animal has its own *Zanahary*.... He is the source of both good and evil. Dualism is lacking.” [Linton 1928:372].

It can be seen, then, from the rather unsure description that from very early on there has been great confusion and haziness surrounding the nature of ‘Zanahary’. The people of *Sahafatra* do not have any clearer cut definition of it today; for them ‘Zanahary’ is not a person or a thing; it does not have a form and is not tangible in any concrete sense. It either represents everything or a force and orientation inherent in everything. The idea of ‘Zanahary’ is so all encompassing that it is a very flexible concept that can be applied in various ways. The people of *Sahafatra* are great raconteurs [*mahay mitantara; mahay tafasiry*] and in this context ‘Zanahary’ is cast as the Creator, but this is only an idiom or a way of speaking [*fomba fiteny*] adapted to fit into the storytelling motif. There is no origin myth for the people here, no heaven and earth dichotomy, no original sin as the explanation of here and now. The only life is this one and the only place to live it is right here; that is why life is sweet [*mamy ny fiainana*] and precious. To say that ‘Zanahary’ is the Creator is a misinterpretation, taking the words too literally - the land has not been created at a certain moment in time; it is a given that has always been there. It is more appropriate to say that life is a story with ‘Zanahary’ at the very heart [*am-po*] of it. For ‘Zanahary’, like the answer to a riddle, is both everywhere and nowhere, in everything and yet nothing, everlasting but timeless.

On a macro scale '*Zanahary*' consists of the whole environmental system and on a micro scale the nature [*toetra*] of every component of that system. But that is not all, '*Zanahary*' is also the dynamic working out of this system from its impossibly complex component parts. A dream [*nofy*] for example is interpreted as a tangible and comprehensible communication from/of '*Zanahary*'. It is not a cosmic revelation, universal truth or message sent from on high but rather the inevitable manifestation of a certain set of conjunctions. This is what makes '*Zanahary*' touch life, makes it accessible, and more importantly manipulable. '*Zanahary*' is not exactly personified (there is no old man with a long white beard sitting on top of a cloud here as for '*Andriamanitra*') but is thought of as sentient or conscious in the sense that it can be 'called on' [*azo aneoha*]. There is a feeling that everything is being directed. '*Zanahary*' is a removed and abstract director, but it is not a person; rather it is the hidden orientation of the world.

'*Fanahy*' and soul-loss

The most incontrovertible proof that humans are implicated in this system is the fact that their '*fanahy*' is said to be given by '*Zanahary*'. '*Fanahy*' is generally translated as soul, but I prefer to think of it as the orientation and animation of the body. '*Fanahy*' is what makes the body a self rather than a shell; it is what makes me 'me' and him 'him'. The root of '*fanahy*' is most likely '*maha ahy*' - which literally means 'make me'; so '*fanahy*' is really concerned with the construction of self. The force of '*Zanahary*' is responsible for allotting each human being with an orientation. Anyone who does not have a orientation is not a person; thus a person cannot be a person without being part of the '*Zanahary*' system. The separation of body and orientation (soul) is very instructive as to what goes to make up a person and therefore makes this point clearly. Soul-loss (loss of orientation [*very fanahy*]) normally occurs at the moment of death but in some instances, such as renegeing on a pact sealed in blood (the 'testing relationship' [*fanange*]), it can happen to a still living person.

When the '*fanahy*' leaves the body of a still living person, that self ceases to exist. What is left is a soul-less (something without orientation) cypher, a directionless droid. The marriage of body and soul (orientation) is what makes a person and the disappearance of either element leads to

their immediate dissolution. The person literally disappears. This is why both madmen and ghosts are invisible. The madman has lost his soul [*very fanahy*] (orientation) and only his shell is left. Human eyes may yet see him but he is not really there [*tsy tena velo*] and consequently he is completely ignored. The ghost [*angatra*] is the reverse; a discontented soul, an orientation without a vehicle [*fanahy tsy misy vata*]. He wanders through the land, lurking in the shadows. As a formless shade he cannot be seen by people [*tsy hitan'olo*]; his presence can only be guessed at.

Human nature and ‘Zanahary’:the impossibility of denial of self

The fact that ‘Zanahary’ is a sort of omnipresent orientation has serious implications for peoples understanding of human nature in general. Peoples actions are judged to stem from their ‘desires’ [*sitra-po*], which in turn stem from their orientation [*fanahy*], or what their body/make-up [*tena*] really wants to do. When a persistent thief was caught again it was said that he was ‘*ratsy zanahary*’. On asking what this meant I was told that it meant he was ‘unlucky’ [*tsy atojony*]. I interpreted this to mean that he was unlucky because he had been caught, but I was mistaken. After a lengthy explanation it became clear that what his repeated larceny proved was that he was acting according to what was ‘pleasing to his heart’ [*arak'sitra-pony*] demonstrating that he was of a ‘wicked disposition’ [*tena ratsy*]. He was literally made of bad stuff/material [*tena*] because stuff/material is necessarily encoded with an orientation [*fanahy*]. This is what made him in a sense unlucky; not the fact that he was captured this time but the fact that his nature [*toetra*] will inevitably lead to him being caught again and again. He is truly unlucky because although it is recognised how unfortunate he is, he nevertheless does not merit pity. For if nature is a like a fixed vector impelling people in a certain direction that cannot be changed then pity is a foolish luxury. Why pity the unreformable thief when it is obviously more appropriate and enjoyable to relish his predicament and take pleasure in his punishment.

This little story demonstrates how it is impossible to escape your own nature for long; the body [*tena*] and the self/orientation [*fanahy*] are too inseparable for it to be otherwise. Additional evidence for this comes from the fact that the word for body/self [*tena*] is also used as a way of

expressing emphasis. For example to say that something is very good you would say that it is '*tena tsara*'. But the emphasis stems from the fact that '*tena*' conveys the idea of something being true to itself. '*Tena*' expresses the embodiment of a quality, its quintessential nature. It means that body, nature and action are perfectly aligned, acting in harmony. Fear of discordance in this relationship encourages each individual to adopt a tailor-made code of behaviour suited to their own orientation. When a request threatens to clash with this code the person concerned will most likely reply: '*malay tena*'. Loosely translated this would mean - 'I really can't do it', but literally it means 'my body/self is unable to do it'.

This intimate interconnection between body, self and nature is learnt very early. Almost the first word every child learns is, as I have already said, the commonest reaction to incessant teasing: '*malay*'. In essence this is a flat refusal or a simple non-acceptance of a proposal (normally something concerning being sold at market, eaten for breakfast or taken away by the nasty foreigner). But what is contained in this one word is expressed in the plaintive wail of any English child: 'Can't! Shan't! Won't!'. If we expand on what the child is trying to say we get: 'I am physically unable to do what you are suggesting; in addition I am not willing to do what you are suggesting; in conclusion I shall not do what you are suggesting!'. For the Malagasy child this complex idea is expressed in one word, '*malay*'. His/her unwillingness to do something is literally embodied.

The truculent behaviour of children is often encouraged by the parents. The development of a strong individual nature (even if it is a contrary nature) is something to be celebrated, laughed about, and in no way constrained even if it threatens to create problems in the future. Natures are allotted and cannot be denied; nature is destiny. The concept of '*anjara*' is very illustrative of this. '*Anjara*' means share (as in share of a piece of meat being divided), lot (as in lot in life), and destiny. The three meanings fused in the concept of '*anjara*' contains a harsh message: what one actually gets in life is the same as what one deserves to get in life. Morality is not necessarily a central issue or a guiding force; it is side-lined by the dictates of nature.

It is the far reaching nature of this formulation that is remarkable. Health and peace of mind can only be attained by the successful alignment of nature/orientation and behaviour. This is not a

deterministic theory because it is recognised that you can fight against your nature; but it is an uphill struggle and a battle that will inevitably be lost. Going against your nature makes you difficult and touchy, literally ‘sick in the heart’ [*marary fo*]. In extreme cases the misalignment of behaviour and nature/make-up can kill. This, for example, is the case with some taboos [*fady*]. A taboo essentially consists of clashing substances, or incompatible make-ups. It is an unharmonious relationship between two codes. Taboo is a particular part of the ‘*Zanahary*’ system separated out from the rest because it is of particular concern to humans. The ‘*Zanahary*’ system is not a set of fixed rules but rather a largely uncharted collection of potentially harmful combinations [cf Ruud 1960: 290-301]. One substance/being/code literally ‘cannot stand’ or ‘endure’ [*tsy mahazaka*] the presence of another. Taboo [*fady*] is the recognition of the existence of the system and the beginning of an attempt to map it out [cf Lambek 1992 for a complementary view of taboo as an internal means of embodied social identification as well as an external construction ²]. Mapping out clashes and, conversely, compatible combinations is the natural reaction of those who are ambitious to thrive in a world governed by invisible ‘*Zanahary*’. Such a strategy indirectly obeys the general principle, put forward by Graeber, governing taboos in *Imerina*, namely that: “the power to impose restrictions [*fady*] is ultimately continuous with the violence through which these restrictions are enforced” [Graeber 1995:266]. The only difference lies in the fact that the violence referred to by Graeber stems from angry or vengeful ancestors whereas the violence in the *Sahafatra* case is largely amoral and simply results from incompatibility within the ‘*Zanahary*’ system.

Invisible ‘*Zanahary*’: a system of elements

No-one can see ‘*Zanahary*’ so no-one knows if ‘*Zanahary*’ is above, below or somewhere in between [*tsy fantatra laha ambony, ambany na anivo*]. The average ‘Man in the Rice-Paddy’, having reached this philosophical position (that it is impossible for him to know), is not much interested in taking the reasoning any further. He is much more concerned with being able to exercise some control over his daily life and takes practical steps to further this aim. In the first place when calling on ‘*Zanahary*’ he does not worry where ‘*Zanahary*’ is, but simply calls out to be heard in all the cardinal directions: “*Zanahary* to the north, *Zanahary* to the east, *Zanahary*

to the south, *Zanahary* to the west...”.

However this general appeal [*fangeha*] is not considered sufficient. The average practitioner, recognising that ‘*Zanahary*’ is distant [*alavitra*], unknowable and therefore unreliable concentrates on matters closer to home. Since everything (man, animal, vegetable, mineral) is invested with or constituted by ‘*Zanahary*’ [*namboarin’Zanahary*], thereby defining its nature or essential make-up, it is possible to embark on a project that outlines the general characteristics of classes [*karaza*] of things. It is by this method that man can approach ‘*Zanahary*’ and to some extent learn how to know, read and interpret the world. An approximation to ‘*Zanahary*’ is to see the world as consisting of elements each with its own nature. If one knows something’s nature one at least has an idea of how to handle it appropriately. This is why the people of *Sahafatra* have, and constantly update, a rough mental chart of elements and their properties.

The three major mediums³ that are considered to go to make up the world are Earth [*tany*], Water [*rano*] and Wind [*rivotra*]. Earth is regarded as the most stable (it is said to ‘sleep’ [*mandry*]), Water as the most catalytic (it is ‘powerful’ [*mahery*]), and Wind as the most volatile (it ‘fluctuates’ [*miova*]). Earth is the solid base of the system (it does ‘not change’ [*tsy miova*]), Water is the animator that ‘brings it to life’ [*mahavelo*] and Wind the capricious trickster that generates chaos [*mivadibadika*].

The nature of the different elements dictates the strategies needed to deal with them. The inactive but potentially fertile earth is the foundation on which life must be rooted [*ny tany lonaky ny fototra ny olom-belo*]; man aims to ground himself firmly in the template of the Earth, staking his claim to the land and his inalienable right to exploit it. The powerful but unruly water is what activates the earth [*mampiasa ny tany*]; it must be harnessed, husbanded, channelled and not allowed to run out of control. The wild wind is the air that we breathe, the words that we speak [*minday teny*] and the space that we feel; while remaining wary of the dangers [*loza*] it poses we must yet live in it, use it to communicate and travel through it. This trinity of elements comprises the domain of man, the inevitable lot he must contend with. He plants his feet firmly on the ground, works and manipulates the water and lets the wind carry his words.

However man is not the only inhabitant in this world. Stones [*vato*], wood [*hazo*], forest [*ala*], plants [*zava-mitsiry*], crops [*vokatra*], animals [*biby*], spirits [*tromba*], ghosts [*angatra*], spirit familiars [*kokolampy*] and invisible forces [*tamberitany*] - all share this world with man. Elements, growing things, living and thinking things, people and non-human beings all display their own characteristic traits [*toetra*], tend to appear in certain places at certain times and behave in certain and singular ways. At one end of the spectrum there is the fixed immobility of rocks [*vato*] and standing stones [*orim-bato*] while at the opposite extreme are the ethereal intangible forces, shades that can take no form [*angatra*]. In between exist the truly living [*olom-belo*]- those that not only have form and shape but that can move too [*olo mandeha*]. But the truly living, like all great heroes, are fatally flawed for they must die [*ny olo aby ho maty*]. While they live they must attempt to steer a middle-course between the 'lifelessness of stone' [*vato maty*] and the 'formlessness of shades' [*angatra tsy mana tena*].

.....

The implications: how people and 'Zanahary' are inseparable

The fact that 'Zanahary' is a type of 'orientation' found in people as well as things ⁴ demonstrates how people and 'Zanahary' are inseparable. It is their inseparability that allows them to influence each other. This is an important foundation for my thesis because it helps explain how and why people (as active agents) can model themselves on certain aspects of 'Zanahary' (natural processes found in the world) with the aim of generating blessing. People mimic reactions that are already known to be life-giving in the hope of creating an additional bit of 'secondary blessing' for themselves.

Perceiving 'Zanahary' as a system of elements affects how people see the world. Recognition of the immense force of the environment (of which man is a part) leads people to adopt strategies that will harness the force. This is no simple matter, however, as people must contend with the dangers associated with handling such tremendous power. The only safe way of behaving is to follow tried and tested combinations of elements that have proven effective in the past. To an extent this explains the tenacity with which people hold onto 'custom' [*fomba*]; 'custom' being something that has already demonstrated good results.

As a result there are certain time-honoured ways of using the ‘elements’. The most common and successful formula the people of *Sahafatra* have discovered is to connect themselves to the land. They do this by several means: disposing of the umbilical cords of their children in a standard fashion; farming the land in a particularly violent way; sacrificing cattle and spraying their blood on the ground; orienting and building their houses in a certain way; burying the dead in carefully positioned tombs; erecting commemorative standing stones in conspicuous places. All these methods of connection have been, or will be, discussed at some point in the thesis. However what is important at this moment is to see how humans seem to derive their power from a formulaic and active relationship with the land. One must be attached to the land in order to manipulate the elements in a productive way. Once people are anchored to the stability of the earth they can bring it to life through its combination with water. In order to demonstrate this I shall concentrate on outlining this most potent reaction within the system of elements, that between earth and water. I shall examine the critical combination of earth and water with specific reference to the disposal of umbilical cords and to farming in order to show how humans tap into the force generated by this ‘elemental’ reaction.

The umbilical cord [*foitra*]: multi-plug and extension lead in one

The concept of ‘*foitra*’ [umbilical cord] is concerned with attachment, whether it be a concrete physical link or a perceived reality. The ‘*foitra*’ is most literally the umbilical cord but it is by association also the navel, the centre and the headquarters. Metaphorically it is a thread or a connection, or a point to which one gravitates [cf Middleton 1995:223-233 on umbilical cords and origin points]. To some extent then the ‘*foitra*’ is both the connection and the socket(s) it is plugged into. The lead itself is a vital tool but just a tool nonetheless; it is what is at both ends of the lead that counts. The umbilical cord [*foitra*] is the original prototypical connection between mother and child and the means of making future connections possible. It is this that makes the concept of ‘*foitra*’ so complex. It not only covers the original concrete model but also encompasses all the applications and elaborations and imaginative jumps based on that initially simple exemplar. Once that first cord is cut all sorts of new possibilities suggest themselves. Thus cutting a cord is not simply severing one attachment it is necessarily introducing the

possibility of another. By default the individual must be reoriented. When the umbilical cord is cut and the baby is severed from its mother this is in preparation for connection with the 'land and the ancestors' [*didina ny foitra, da tena afaka mahafototra zaza amin'ny tanin-draza*]. From this point onwards the '*foitra*' [umbilical cord] becomes a metaphor for any life-giving connection. For instance although '*mandidy foitra*' literally means to cut the umbilical cord it also means to circumcise. Entry into the 'society of men' [*vatan-delahy*] brought about by circumcision of young boys is considered to be a life-giving connection, a kind of re-centring; therefore it falls into the bracket of the '*foitra*' concept.

Lifelines: rivers and umbilical cords [*foitra*]

As we have seen '*foitra*' [umbilical cords] are lifelines. Rivers are also thought of as lifelines⁵ because they transport the life-giving water that will bring the earth to life and because they allow the transmission of the ancestral force which promotes the well-being of the living. This is why rivers are also '*foitra*'. The water in the rivers is an essential component of the irrigated agricultural system and it is also a home for all the disembodied, a medium through which the ancestors can move easily. Thus water provides a fluid resource and a channel of communication enabling close contact between the living and the dead. Water is likened to blood circulating in the body and the networks of rivers are compared to the veins and arteries that transport it [*ny rano amin'ny renirano, ra amin'ny ozatra*].

Several rivers in the area actually carry the name '*Foitra*' suggesting an awareness of the metaphorical connection between rivers and umbilical cords as roots, sources of sustenance and life. Umbilical cords link mothers to children; umbilical cords link the living to the ancestors; rivers link people to the land; rivers link people to their ancestors. People are aware of a complex set of inter-combinations, of unsolved equations that are all the more powerful and emotive for not being consciously and conspicuously worked out. It is these shrouded associations that provide the motivation for certain customs, the feeling that one ought to carry them out even if one is uncertain exactly why.

The disposal of the umbilical cord

All the *Sahafatra* groups dispose of their umbilical cords in different places, but places that are nevertheless of the same kind [*mitovy toetra*]. The *Antsoro* throw the umbilical cords of their new born children into their principal rivers, the *Tandreha* and *Maromanidra*; the *Masitafika* throw the umbilical cords [*foitra*] of their children into the *Namorana* in the shade of the huge stand of bamboo by the great iron bridge built by the French; the *Vohilakatra* of *Masim-boay* into a different spot on the *Namorana*; the *Vohilakatra* of *Antririlava* into the *Anambiha*; the *Tevongo* of *Tsaragisy* and *Saharesa* throw the umbilical cords [*foitra*] of their children into their ancestral river, the *Soanandrehy*; the *Tsaretry* into various tributaries [*vava-rano*] of the *Menanivo*. Each group selects a special place [*voatokana*] on a local stretch of water for the throwing away of the cord.

It is forbidden to dispose of the umbilical cord [*foitra*] in any other place. If a blessing is to be begged from ‘*Zanahary*’ or the ancestors the water required is fetched from the very same place suggesting that it has been made especially ‘potent’ [*masy*] ⁶. If the child is born far away the cord must be faithfully transported back so the child can be properly grounded [*akenina*] in his/her ancestral homeland [*tanin-drazana*]. Even wage labourers working far away should remember to send the umbilical cord [*foitra*]. The time delay is not critical but eventually when it has dried out it should be safely placed in a big metal trunk, carefully cushioned by clothes and accompanied by the father to its final destination. It is not acceptable to send the umbilical cord [*foitra*] by post.

However the umbilical cord returns to the ancestral homeland there is a special procedure to be followed for its disposal once it has arrived there. The cord [*foitra*] must be wrapped in a small piece of cloth (no particular colour), tied up and then weighted down with a stone to ensure that it sinks and stays put. The father must then go alone to the designated place where all the cords are thrown; (if a women throws the cord it is said that the baby will be soft-headed [*malemy loha*]). First he throws in a small denomination silvery coin [*vola fotsy/tsangan-olo*] ⁷ to attract the attention of the ancestors, please them by this demonstration of respect, and alert them to what is about to happen. Then, without further ceremony or fuss, he throws in his little package

[*ariana fahatany*] and begs for blessing: “Look after my child, make my child healthy, for this is the cord that makes the ancestors truly ancestors” [*Da mahasoa, mahatsara any zanako fa itiky ny foitra maharaza ny raza, tena raza*].

It is usual for a still stretch of water to be chosen to prevent the cord being washed away. After the cord has struck the surface of the water and started sinking a small whirlpool [cf Beaujard 1983a:314 for symbolic importance of whirlpools as sources of water] can be seen as the ancestors take hold of it (the very same ancestors as live in the tomb). The idea is of something returning to its source. The umbilical cord [*foitra*] is not swept downstream to the sea but sinks to the bottom and becomes embedded; it ‘plants’ [*mahafototra*] itself in the riverbed and is held in place by the ancestors [*mitazo raza*]. The flexible connective capacity of the umbilical cord [*foitra*] comes into play and a new and permanent link is formed.

The marriage of earth and water

It is the actual disposal of the umbilical cord that gives a clue as to why the marriage between earth and water is absolutely critical. As I have described the umbilical cord is always thrown into a predesignated, slow moving section of the principal river in the ancestral homeland [*tanindraza*]. It comes to rest on the earth on the bottom of the riverbed where it remains, constantly being washed over by the flow of the stream above. The umbilical cord, a literal and metaphorical connection, is thus being used to link earth and water [cf Thomas 1997 on creating ‘rootedness’].

Put simply the combination of earth and water is the combination of the power of the dead with the vitality of the living. In the elemental system when water and earth are brought together life, in the form of rice, is generated. Likewise in the human system: the combination of earth and water reinforces life by connecting the world of the living and the world of the dead . The two systems, human and elemental, become blurred and interchangeable ⁸.

The ancestors are associated with the earth; when they are buried in the tomb in the ancestral

homeland they decompose [*lo*] and become inseparable from the earth around them; they are said to have 'gone to the land' or 'turned to earth' [*lasa tany*]. The ancestors become part of the system of elements and consequently can only be accessed in conjunction with a set of wider forces. The ancestors are thought literally to 'go to make up the land' [*ny raza mahatany*]; the more ancestors that are buried in a place the stronger the link of the living to that particular spot. However without the vitalising and communicative power of water the bond between the ancestors and their living descendants cannot be fully realised. It is only through paralleling and mimicking the elemental earth-water reaction that their connection can be activated.

Farming: agricultural alchemy

The second critical combination takes place not in the river-bed but in the rice-paddy. The people of *Sahafatra* are essentially subsistence farmers but more critically they identify themselves as wet rice-farmers [*pamboly vary-hosy*]. For them the act of wet-rice farming is the defining, and supremely 'good', custom [*fomba*]; it is their 'raison d'être'. Such is their concern to constantly monitor the state of the rice paddies that people find it very hard to leave their fields even for a few days: when we encountered people away from home they often complained about the 'worry' [*sahira*] of not knowing if their water channels [*lakan-drano*] were flowing properly, or whether their paddies were too flooded [*tsikoatra*] or too dry [*maika loatra*].

Before any field can be planted with rice the paddy must be prepared; water must be carefully channelled into the paddy and violently trampled into the dry earth until the two substances combine to form a deep, rich, waist-high, muddy morass ready to receive rice-seed or transplanted seedlings. The size and quality of the harvest depends on this proper preparation; if the trampling is not sufficient the rice stands no chance of thriving. To survive, therefore, clearly involves being able to successfully manage earth and water, for it is the alchemical mixing of these two transmutable substances that generates the food that supports life. This is why these mediums/elements (for they are both) at the heart of our spectrum are regarded as the raw materials of life.

The trampling [*manosy*] of the rice paddy

It is evident that the critical conjunction between earth and water is engineered in the rice-paddy itself: the anchoring earth which threatens to ‘lie dormant’ [*tany mandry*] forever (tending towards ‘dead stone’ [*vato maty*]) is brought to life by the ‘wild water’ [*rano masy*] which, although it threatens to wash away, drown, swamp and engulf all in its path (tending towards ‘uncontrollable wind’ [*rivotra mivadibadika*]), is in fact tamed and ‘made to work’ [*ampiasaina*]. The only force strong enough to catalyse, control and bring about this earth-water reaction consists of strong cattle [*aomby mahery*] trampling the ground, driven on by wild young warriors [*panabaka*]. The vitality of the most vital of animals (the cow) is brought out by the vitality of the most vital type of people (the warriors).

Whenever a paddy needs to be ‘trampled’ [*osena*] the same standard procedure is followed. Having gathered together the family cattle, teams of ‘warriors’ strip down to loin-cloths and enter the paddy. They then proceed to goad and torment the unwilling cattle into action by hitting them with sticks, wrestling with them, tweaking their ears, twisting their balls, and mounting them from behind. The terrified, and sometimes angry, cattle circulate round the paddy, constantly chased by the warriors, in a desperate attempt to escape their persecutors. In the process they trample [*manosy*] the earth and water together, gradually turning them into a thick compound of sticky goo [*fotaka*]. The panic of the cows is easy to see as their eyes bulge and their necks strain; however it is the very panic of the cows that makes them violent and in a sense efficacious. As the mud gets deeper they have to work harder to move forward, rearing up on their hind legs like people in order to make progress. All the while the warriors continue their provocations, taking great pleasure in their cruel game, whooping and screaming with enjoyment as they themselves become plastered with mud. Eventually the cows can move no more and sink exhausted into the mud, beyond caring what punishment might be meted out to them for their disobedience. The warriors, who know the cows are defeated, relent and cajole them out of the mud. However their own high spirits cannot be dampened; in a state of elated ecstasy they run the cattle down to the riverside where they will be washed down.

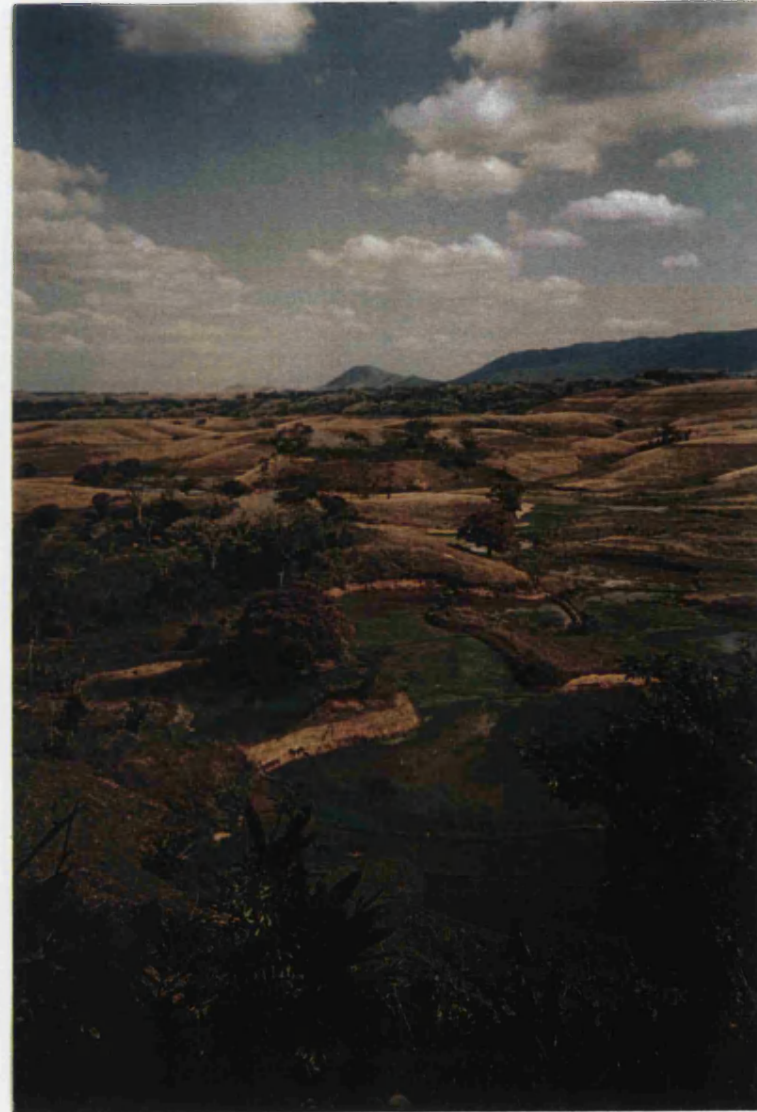
This whole process, known as ‘*manosy*’ (which refers to the actions of the ‘warriors’ and the

trampling of the cows), is thought of as the critical act of cultivation. Although the production of rice is obviously a complex and drawn-out process, involving human input at several stages, it is essentially thought to rest on this initial procedure; if the trampling is satisfactorily completed then the prognosis for the overall harvest is good. It is this perception of the trampling procedure [*manosy*] as the ultimate 'good' that has led to the acting out of a human version. The belief that a human recreation of the critical elemental process engendered in agriculture can generate 'secondary blessing' has informed the ritual of the 'raising-up' of *panjaka* and led to a type of human alchemy.

The 'raising-up' up of the *panjaka* as human alchemy

I intend to demonstrate that the general grammar of the combination of earth and water can be applied to people and that the 'raising up' of *panjaka* constitutes a type of human alchemy. For a human version of agricultural alchemy to work people must come to represent the elements involved in the reaction: as I will show this is part of the reason why Earth-Shakers come to be likened to the land/earth while the subjects come to be likened to the water. However it is not sufficient for the people to simply represent the elements if they want the reaction to succeed; they must also take on the properties of these elements. The Earth-Shaker must not only be likened to earth, he must be like earth [cf Lienhardt 1961:303 on the association between Dinka Spear-Masters, who are sacrificially buried alive, and the Earth]; the subjects must not only be likened to water, they must be like water.

Even this, though, is not enough to reproduce the reaction; in order to achieve this the conditions for the elemental reaction must also be replicated. This involves symbolically constructing a rice paddy to provide an arena, introducing a sacrificial cow at the appropriate moment, and carefully choreographing the participants so that they can effectively act out the elemental drama. Like the elemental reaction itself the ritual is active not static; as we will see the constituent components are not just carefully arranged, they are arranged so that they can move in correct relation to each other. This however is not the end of the story. Although the ritual is essentially mimicking an elemental reaction to generate 'secondary blessing' it is not attempting a



The 'raising-up' of the Earth-Shaker and the land that he makes fertile

straightforward copy. This is the case for two main reasons: firstly, as I have shown in Chapter 4, the ritual most obviously serves to test and symbolically ‘raise up’ the *panjaka* and thus contains devices directed to those purposes; secondly to mimic an elemental reaction, interfering with the laws of nature, is a dangerous process, necessitating the mobilisation of all human forces to ensure safe completion.

I therefore suggest that, although the dominant idiom being expressed concerns the combination of earth and water, subsidiary schemas relating to the proper alignment of human forces are also being played out during the ritual. Of these subsidiary schemas the most important concern descent, gender complementarity and the harnessing of female fertility, the modelling of a giant ‘body’ headed by the *panjaka*, and the creation of a world where the *panjaka* is an immovable centre which the subjects gravitate towards. I interpret these sub-plots in two ways: in one sense all the human forces are being marshalled (under the jurisdiction of the *panjaka*) in opposition to the non-human force of the environment; in another sense the combined human force is being used in precisely the opposite way to access, in a controlled manner, the non-human power of the environment. I suggest that these apparently contradictory approaches are not as contradictory as they seem: human systems have to be explicitly set out and reified so that the shapeless and undirected ‘force of the environment’ can be channelled into forms relevant to human-beings.

Why the Earth-Shakers are likened to, and are like, the land

The Earth-Shakers are like the land because they are made to be so [cf Feierman 1996:46⁹]. To understand this we should in the first instance return to examine more carefully their actual title of ‘*kobatany*’, the title by which everyone refers to them all the time. The term ‘*kobatany*’ is said to explicitly refer to those who ‘rule the land’ [*mandidy tany*] but the word itself contains clues as to how they are thought to achieve this. Following the root words supplied to me by informants I provisionally translated ‘*kobatany*’ [*koba(ka) + tany*] as ‘agitated land’ and interpreted this as meaning that the leaders were implicated in an active relationship with the land itself. I therefore chose to label the leaders as Earth-Shakers since this gave the impression not only of rulers (which the subjects insisted they were) but also of people intimately involved with

the productive processes of the land (following more closely the literal translation). Now, in order to make apparent the full nature of Earth-Shakers, I analyse the word '*kobatany*' more closely.

'*Kobaka*' is translated in the Abinal/Malzac dictionary as: "Agitation d'un liquide, (ou) d'un chose gluante" [the agitation of a liquid, or of something sticky] with water in a rice paddy being specifically singled out as an example ("comme l'eau dans les rizieres"). '*Tany*' is translated as: "La terre; terrain, sol, pays, royaume" [the land; terrain, soil, country, kingdom]. When the two root words are put together in the composite term '*kobatany*' their new form seems to clearly evoke the 'agitation of sticky earth', the manipulation of earth and water in the rice-paddy, or what I have termed the critical act of cultivation. And yet, since '*tany*' means land, country or kingdom as much as it means earth, the term '*kobatany*' can also be applied in a scalar fashion to metaphorically represent the shaking-up and reorganisation of the polity by the leader.

It is the double meaning that I have described above that sums up the role of the Earth-Shakers; as masters of human alchemy they are the ones who facilitate the recreation of the life-giving elemental reaction that guarantees human reproduction and therefore society itself¹⁰. Their position as facilitators clears up why one of the key conditions for being an Earth-Shaker is to still actively farm the land. In order to facilitate the elemental reaction one must remain in contact with the earth and its processes; this is why it is not uncommon to encounter Earth-Shakers wading waist deep in mud as they clear and weed the rice-paddies. However Earth-Shakers are not just orchestrators, they are also an elemental material; since, as I briefly stated in Chapter 2, the subjects are self-professedly 'the water' we know by default that it is the role of the Earth-Shaker to play (or rather 'be') the earth. Below I develop how this comes to pass and also how the subjects come to be like 'the water'.

From ruling territory to being the land

One of the ways the Earth-Shaker comes to be like the land is through ruling it. An Earth-Shaker is like the earth because he represents all his subjects who are spread out over the land. Since

each parcel of territory that the subjects lay claim to and farm is under the authority of the Earth-Shaker, he, by extension, rules the land in its entirety and so comes to be associated with the land in general. If we imagine the distribution and allegiance of houses this becomes clear. A house alone is an isolated productive unit; each individual house is, however, focused on a Fertile that represents a collection of houses that goes to make up a loose territory; each Fertile is, in turn, focused on the Fertile of an Earth-Shaker which represents the sum of all those loose territories and which is thus equated with the land [cf de Heusch 1982:281 for an example of alternative but similar methods of associating a leader with the 'nation' by distancing from personal kinship ties]. Supporting evidence for this interpretation is provided by similar cases recorded for the *Tanala* and the *Merina*: the house of the *Tanala* sovereign [*tranobe*] is said to represent the whole kingdom and cannot be partitioned as this would symbolise the desire to divide it [Beaujard 1983a:306]; in the same vein the centre-post [*andriambo*] of the *Merina* monarch's palace represented the centre of the whole kingdom, encompassing all the centre-posts and houses of his subjects [cf Bloch 1995b]. Since in the *Sahafatra* case, as I have already pointed out (Chapter 2), the concept of the leader is inseparable from the concept of the house he lives in, the leader can truly be said to be the land ¹¹ [for a *Vevo* example of people becoming things cf Astuti 1995a:101 on the '*hazomanga*'].

Shared properties of Earth-Shakers and the earth

The Earth-Shaker is not only likened to the land in this sense; he also displays properties of the earth. As I have already noted the earth is thought of as an intrinsically stable, immobile and impersonal entity. The Earth-Shaker reflects these characteristics in his demeanour and comportment; in his official capacity he never smiles but maintains a permanently impassive and emotionless expression; he does not talk but remains silent [*mangina*] allowing a spokesman (the Eye of the Water) to represent him; he does not move but forces his subjects to come to him [*manatona*].

The Earth-Shaker is also like the earth because he is bountiful [*lonaky*]; he is a repository of life. However, like the earth his bounty is not easily brought forth. The earth is famed for its potential

fertility and the Earth-Shaker is known for his potential munificence but both must be forced to release their life-giving goodness. Both the Earth-Shaker and the earth are dormant powers that must be animated and vitalised in order to support growth and production. The earth itself is attacked head on through farming. The Earth-Shaker is also taken on but in a ritual combat with his subjects. This in part helps explain the phenomenon of the ‘capturing’ [*fanambori*] of the *panjaka*; they are ‘captured’ [*sambori*] so that symbolic violence can be purposefully directed towards them. Both the Earth-Shaker and the earth need water and cows to animate them; this is the form the violence takes. The earth is literally combined with the water through the manipulative animal force of cattle; the Earth-Shaker on the other hand is symbolically flooded with water in the form of his subjects. In this case the catalyst of the cattle is provided in sacrificial form; cows given by the Earth-Shaker are slaughtered to ensure the successful combination of the two elements ¹².

How the subjects are likened to, and are like, the water

When I say that the subjects are like ‘water’ I am following their own self-identification; it is after all the subjects who explicitly liken themselves to, and characterise themselves as, ‘water’ [*rano*], especially when they gather in numbers in the court environment or when they are in the presence of the *panjaka*. It is important not to forget that this identification with water is reified in the official structure of the court: in the courtly idiom the subjects are ‘the water’ [*ny rano*], the person who mediates between them and the *panjaka* is the ‘Eye of the Water’ [*mason-drano*], and the *panjaka* is, by implication, ‘the earth’ [*ny tany*].

Not only do the subjects often refer to themselves as ‘the water’ [*ny rano*], they actually associate themselves with, and believe themselves to possess some of the properties and qualities of, water. Water is valued for its wild and uncontrolled power as a generator of fertility [cf Bloch 1986:74-78 on powerful water for the *Merina*]; its most concrete association is as the critical and unpredictable element in the production of wet-rice. The comparison subjects make between themselves and the water therefore suggests the perceived vitality, force and undifferentiated nature of the subjects. The subjects in a sense view themselves as a liquid body that fills up the

Fertile, vitalising and engulfing the senior *panjaka* (the Earth).

The undifferentiated nature of the people, which encourages the association of the subjects of a Fertile to water, is based on a real breaking away from ordered descent relations. As I have demonstrated in Chapter 2 the concept of the Fertile (in opposition to the idea of the Big-House) is based on being able to incorporate a whole agglomeration of people, who are not strictly related to one another through descent relations, into one house. In this arrangement people are held together by loyalty to a shared house rather than by allegiance to a single shared ancestor. The people actively choose to aggregate themselves in an essentially undifferentiated way and this is what makes them really like water. The fact that these undifferentiated relations are likened to powerful water, suggests that undifferentiated relations are thought to be potent in themselves.

The ‘wateriness’ of the subjects is most closely realised at ritual events when the Fertile is crammed full to bursting. No-one can move once they are wedged in and the house is continually said to be literally ‘overflowing’ [*tsikoatra*] with people. Everyone is delighted by the overwhelming crush, and high on the atmosphere of all the human force contained in the room. It is impossible not to be infected with the general enthusiasm and high spirits on these occasions. For the people a ‘supremely full-house’ [*feno be ny trano*] signifies success, growth, power and ‘completion’ [*vano*]. As is made evident by the emphatic use of the idiom of ‘overflowing’ [*tsikoatra*], fullness is interpreted in terms of liquid flooding. Those present cannot stop gleefully going on about how they will have to build a new house to accommodate everyone in the future [*mila mamboatra trano vaovao fa maro be loatra ny olo; rano tsikoatra!*].

The idea of ‘wateriness’ comes from this undifferentiated and vital mass. The metaphor is heightened by other associations. When people get together in the Fertile the major activity is drinking the locally distilled rum [*toaka*]. The server wades through the human sea with his enamelware tray and tiny cups, doing the rounds dishing out the rum. The rum itself is colloquially known as ‘water’ [*rano*] and its inebriating effects add to the generally perceived ‘wateriness’ of the occasion. The subjects (the water), already high on atmosphere, get wilder as they drink the ‘water’. Water is a sort of background idiom on these occasions. Once when

we were attending a ceremony and we were all jammed in the Fertile/Big-House it started to rain outside. It was an auspicious moment; everyone indoors was jubilant. The rain starting just then was interpreted as a sign of blessing and future well-being.

Re-analysis of the ritual ‘raising-up’ of the *panjaka*: the main plot

Now that I have established that the Earth-Shaker is ‘the earth’, and the subjects are ‘the water’ (as far as the elemental reaction is concerned) I will embark on a re-analysis of the ritual ‘raising-up’ of the *panjaka*. The ceremonial raising-up of the *panjaka* puts all the component elements in place for the above described ‘life-giving’ [*mahavelo*] reaction to take place. The first step in the analysis is to demonstrate the creation of an appropriate arena for the ritual. This arena physically consists of the Fertile of the *panjaka* and its immediate environs; however it is not the physical space itself that is critical but its transformation into a symbolic rice-paddy and into a focal point for the subjects.

The Fertile of the Earth-Shaker is not like an ordinary house. An ordinary house is oriented according to the cardinal directions but nothing is oriented towards it; it is like a floating entity inside which people orient themselves to each other. The Fertile [*lonaky*], on the other hand, is fixed in space by the houses situated around it; the Fertile [*lonaky*] is a ritual, emotional and geographical centre drawing things in to it. The Earth-Shaker’s Fertile [*lonaky*] is thought to be central in that it encompasses everything; it incorporates all the small worlds to become the ‘universe’. This is how it comes to be the prime focal point for the subjects.

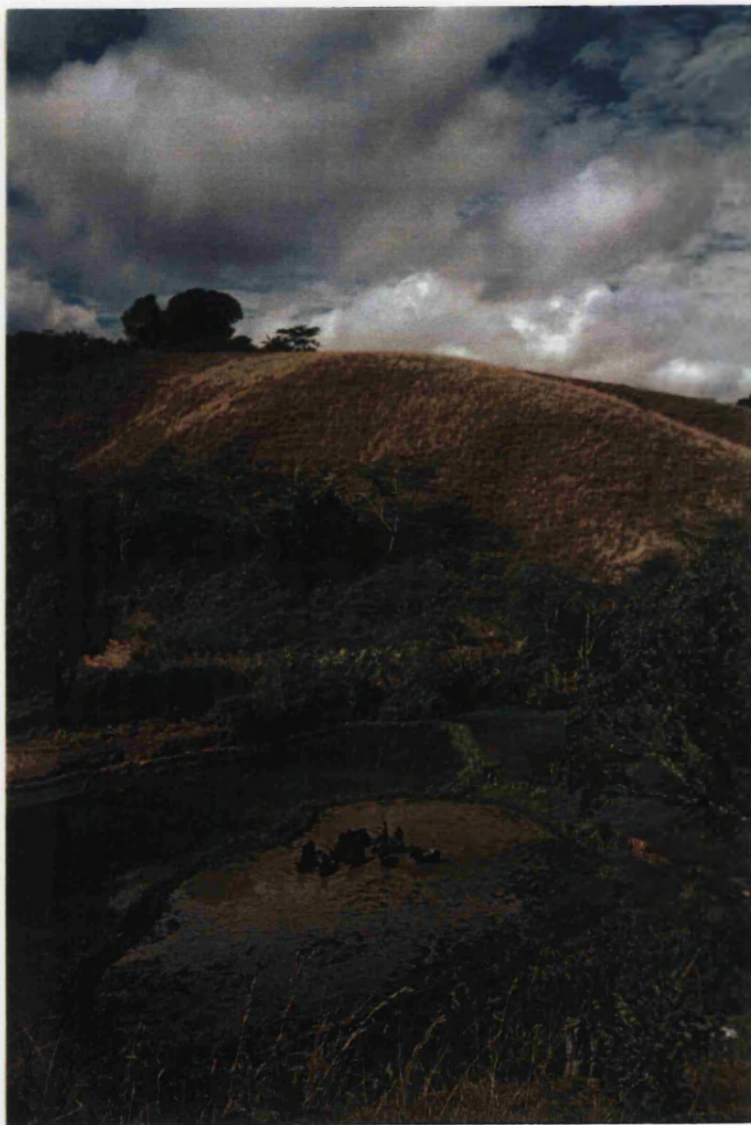
The focal point takes the form of a rice-paddy because on ritual occasions it is imagined in these terms. The area around the Fertile and the floor-space inside it are thought of as a rice-paddy [*tani-kosy*]. The walls [*rindry*] of the building itself are likened to the earthen dykes [*tahan-drano*] that surround the paddy and the lines of approaching subjects to the water channels [*lakan-drano*] that supply it. The way the space is used symbolically alters according to temporal considerations, the focus of attention shifting according to what stage of the ritual is being played out. Initially everybody concentrates on the columns of arriving participants; then attention shifts

to the space encircling the Fertile where the symbolic trampling of the paddy is acted out; and finally all is focused on the correct arrangement of elements within the Fertile. The paddy therefore exists both inside and outside the house; however the outside represents the processual part of the ritual and the inside represents the final desired state.

The dynamics of human alchemy

Once the conceptual stage is set the actual dynamics of human alchemy are quite straightforward, even, we might say, 'elementally' simple. The Fertile of the *panjaka* and the *panjaka* himself (as I have shown they are inseparable ideas), representing the land, draw in the subjects, who represent the water, to the village. Before the alchemical combination of the gathered participant elements can then begin a ritual rice-meal known as the '*faha*' must be served up to, and eaten by, everyone present. The meal completed, the *panjaka* heads towards the Fertile closely followed by his rowdy supporters. The perambulation of the *panjaka* around the Fertile, during which he is constantly being violently pushed forward by the crowd of subjects, represents the mixing of earth and water [the *Tanala* interpretation of the perambulation at a royal enthronement likens it to a whirlpool cf Beaujard 1983a:314]; the *panjaka* is 'trampled' [*osena*] by his subjects (who represent both the water and the trampers simultaneously) in the same way as the earth is trampled by the 'warriors' [*panabaka*] in the rice paddy. This trampling is not only symbolically expressed through the way the *panjaka* is shoved and jostled outside of the Fertile, but also by the way the subjects scream and bang on the walls and roof of the house as the *panjaka* enters inside.

Once the *panjaka* has successfully entered the Fertile everything comes to rest in its proper place; the water (the subjects) and the earth (the *panjaka*) which have been forced to react together are allowed to settle like the water and earth in a rice paddy after trampling. This settled state is represented by the silent and gloomy figure of the *panjaka* sitting still [*mipetraka avao*] and mute in the northeast corner of the Fertile (with his wife the Royal Woman beside him) surrounded by the mass of animated and lively, but now stationary, subjects.



Trampling a rice paddy (left); column of men arriving at a 'raising-up' ceremony (right).

The sacrificial cow is brought up to the Fertile at this point and wrestled to the ground. Its life is the missing catalyst needed to complete the reaction which explains in part why it is thought of as ‘sharp’ [*maranitra*] and ‘efficacious’ [*masy*]. It constitutes the final part of the equation because it is its energy and vitality that binds the earth and water together. In everyday life this ‘binding’ is achieved through the action of cattle in the rice paddy; in the ritual performance, however, the binding is brought about symbolically through the sacrifice of the *panjaka*’s cow. The sacrifice of the cow not only symbolically binds the earth and water together, it also seals the moral contract between the subjects and their ruler.

Before the cow is killed ‘*Zanahary*’ is invoked by the Eye of the Water; while he summons ‘*Zanahary*’ from all directions the *panjaka* remains silent and impassive like the earth. The invocation is essentially a supplication and involves the offering up of the cow to ‘*Zanahary*’ with the aim of receiving blessing in return. The wording of the appeal, asking ‘*Zanahary*’ to make the Fertile thrive and prosper, makes it quite clear that the power of life and death lies with ‘*Zanahary*’. ‘*Zanahary*’ is cast as the creator of people, that which “made the hands and made the feet” [see Chapter 4], and as the controller of their destinies. ‘*Zanahary*’ is therefore invited to jointly partake of the cow with the people [*hahalany aomby atsika*] in the hope that this will encourage blessing to be bestowed.

Once the appeal has been made the cow is ritually killed; the ‘life-giving’ reaction is finally made complete through the sacrifice of the cow. The vitality of the cow, sacrificed to ‘*Zanahary*’, combined with the appropriate arrangement of the elements (the people [water] and the ruler [earth]) provides the ideal conditions for allowing blessing to flow. As the cow dies the ‘force of nature’ [*Zanahary*] flows from the ‘environment’ [*Zanahary*], through the *panjaka*, to the people. The death of the cow serves to mark out the culminating and defining moment of the ceremony as it signifies the successful mimicking of the elemental reaction in its entirety¹³.

What is remarkable about this whole process is how different a method it is of constructing royal power compared to other regions of Madagascar, particularly the north-west of the island. Feeley-Harnik has shown for the *Bemihisatra* branch of the *Sakalava* dynasty centred around *Analalava* that royal power is, in large part, created by controlling and literally “penning” slaves

[*sambarivo*] who are obliged to dedicate themselves to ritual royal work [*fanompoana*]. The dominant idiom here is one of controlling labour [cf Feeley-Harnik 1991b:303-363] in contrast to *Sahafatra* where the dominant idiom is one of controlling the ‘environment’ [*Zanahary*]. Even if these opposed models for the generation of royal power are not particularly surprising when we consider that labour has long been the contentious issue around *Analalava* in a way it has not been in the land of *Sahafatra* (where emphasis is put on ‘making the land fertile’ by more elemental means), they are, however, revealing of the primary pre-occupations of the different peoples.

The flow of force

The issue of how exactly the ‘force of nature’ flows from ‘environment’ to *panjaka* is at stake here, and this brings us back to the ceremonial headgear, the ‘*soto-mena*’, discussed earlier in the thesis. As we will discover, it is the wearing of the ‘*soto-mena*’ that allows the blessing to flow from the ‘environment’ [*Zanahary*], through the *panjaka*, to the people. Below I explain how the mechanism works.

Wearing the ‘*soto-mena*’ essentially makes the *panjaka* a different kind of person; when the *panjaka* dons the ceremonial headgear he becomes temporarily removed from the sphere of ordinary human beings and, like a medium [*tromba*], he is possessed. The change occurring to him during the ritual ‘raising-up’ is demonstrated by the wearing of a different hat. In the course of the ceremony the *panjaka* is not possessed by one person but by the people, who are the true ‘owners’ of the ‘*soto-mena*’. This is not the end of it, however, because the *panjaka* is not possessed by the people alone. As has already been discussed, at the raising-up of senior *panjaka*, ‘*Zanahary*’ (the ‘force of the environment’) is called from all directions and becomes part of the general proceedings. What I have failed to mention up to now is how ‘*Zanahary*’ is said to enter the *panjaka* [*miditra am-panjaka Zanahary*]; the *panjaka* is, thus, not only possessed and constituted by the people but by ‘*Zanahary*’ also ¹⁴ [cf Lambek 1981:70-83 for an interpretation of possession as a system of communication].

The fact that ‘*Zanahary*’ can enter humans is not surprising or unique to *panjaka*. In the land of *Sahafatra* when somebody undergoes spirit possession [*tromba*] the force that enters them is known as ‘*Zanahary*’; the unidentified spiritual force is regarded as part of the wider ‘environment’. What happens to a *panjaka* is essentially the same as what happens to a spirit medium; the *panjaka* however is possessed on a much grander scale. The *panjaka*, strengthened by his association with the people, forms a duct for the force of ‘*Zanahary*’; he unites and combines the ‘force of nature’ and the people by orchestrating the mimicking of the trampling of the rice paddy and acting as a channel for the flow of force [cf Lambek 1981:107-123 for the healing aspects of possession]. It is the *panjaka* who is used as the vehicle to harness the ‘force of the environment’ [*Zanahary*] and to thereby generate general fertility¹⁵ because he is the only individual strong enough to manage it¹⁶ [cf Errington 1989:293 on men as vehicles for potency].

Normally a person would be too overcome to cope with such a force; however the *panjaka*, as we have seen, is not. This can be explained if we examine more carefully the symbolism surrounding water. It is clear from the general ethnography of Madagascar that water is the most commonly used agent for the transference of blessing; the application of this principle ranges from the importance attributed to river-mouths (embouchures) [Hurvitz 1986], to the bathing of royal relics often known as ‘*dady*’ [cf Feeley-Harnik 1991b; Beaujard 1983a], to the act of blowing water onto subjects (ritual aspersions [*tso-drano*]) [cf Bloch 1971;1986]. The extension of this principle explains how the subjects in the land of *Sahafatra*, who symbolically represent water, are in effect blessing and strengthening their *panjaka* by engulfing him. There is an interesting role reversal here: normally it is the leader who blesses his subjects with water, but in the *Sahafatra* case, where the leader is a type of hostage, it is also the subjects who bless him.

The subplots

As has previously been made clear, although the *panjaka* may be a formidable individual he can only become super-potent by appropriating the power of his subjects. This limitation brings us back to the subplots and secondary schemas acted out in the ritual; this is because it is only through marshalling his human forces into the special powerful formations that I have already

briefly alluded to (models of descent, female fertility and gender complementarity, the body, and the immovable centre) that the *panjaka* can effectively channel the 'force of nature'. In order to show how the non-human 'force of nature' can be controlled and made relevant to people I very briefly outline the human models assembled with those ends in mind.

The most deeply embedded model incorporated into the ritual is that of the *panjaka* as a centre. This idea is such an integral part of the proceedings that I have not been able to avoid expounding on it throughout the thesis. I hope it is clear by now that the *panjaka* is made central so as to make him potent and so as to make the reaction he orchestrates pertinent [cf Simons 1992:231 on the many ways a king is the 'centre' of society]; to reiterate the point further would be to labour the point. At this stage it is more important to develop the other subplots which are easier to separate out and which have hitherto not been properly examined.

The most obvious assemblage is that of a giant human body; the aggregation of male subjects in the village is referred to as the 'body of men' [*vatan-delahy*] and the *panjaka* is said to represent their 'head' [*loha*]. The constitution of the body is mapped out in the house, with the *panjaka* sitting in the privileged northeast corner (where a 'head' should naturally be) and the rest of the body spread out across the room. The imagining of a body is, in a way, surprising as it presents a stark contrast to the transformation of people into non-human elements also being enacted simultaneously in the Fertile. I, however, interpret the opposition as purposeful; the creation and modelling of a giant human form counter-balances and keeps in check the threat of being overwhelmed by non-human forces.

This make-up of the body appears to exclude women. This though does not mean that women are completely excluded; to the contrary a special effort is made to include them using different means actually incorporated into the ceremonial procedure. It is most important to remember that it is not just the *panjaka* who is 'raised-up' but also his wife who comes to be known as the 'Royal Woman' [*ampela hova*]. She too processes around the Fertile while the female subjects chant 'Woman! Woman! Woman!' [*ampela*], and she too is allowed to sit in the privileged northeast corner of the house, a position normally out of bounds to women who tend to sit by the entrance or around the hearth. It is clear then that a major female component comes into play in

the ritual with the role of women (and their fertility) being celebrated in tandem with the men.

The idea of men and women living in harmony is taken much further still; it is extremely significant that the *panjaka* and his 'royal woman' must sit next to each other in the Fertile. This intimate side-by-side arrangement would never be sanctioned in normal circumstances as people adhere to strict, though informal, principles of sex segregation. The peculiar placement of the two with respect to one another suggests that some symbolic point is being made; it implies that spouses are complementary by nature and more generally it affirms the power of gender complementarity and human fertility. Once again I would argue that this opposition to the elemental world, enacted at the core of the 'raising-up', is purposeful: although the ritual is designed to access the 'force of nature' the ultimate aim is, after all, to promote human well-being and human fertility¹⁷; this inevitably involves representing human fertility and well-being in a tangible and positive way¹⁸.

This brings us on to the final subplot: that of descent. The enactment of descent relations is the primary strategy adopted by the people of *Sahafatra* in order to cope with the world; it should therefore not surprise us to find that descent also crops up in the 'raising-up' ritual. Although the instantiation of the elemental reaction forms the dominant theme in the ceremony, certain aspects of descent are highly visible. First and foremost is the fact that the *panjaka* is explicitly referred to as a 'father' as he perambulates around the Fertile. 'Father! Father! Father!' [*iaba*] the subjects chant as he processes. Almost equally important is that the *panjaka* sits in the northeast corner which is where senior members of the descent group are traditionally placed. It can thus be seen that descent never disappears; issues of descent are inescapable because descent represents the order of humanity. In a ritual designed to access elemental forces descent must be present to guarantee this order.

The marriage of the main plot and the subplots in the house

In order to conclude the chapter I demonstrate the connection between the main plot and the subplots. All the subplots share a common concern for humanity in all its shapes and forms; this

is in strong opposition to the non-human forces invoked in the main plot. It is critical, however, that the two (sets of) plots come together because they inform each other: without the framework provided by the human models there would be no sense in promoting the elemental reaction as there would be no control over the 'force of nature' and no place for it to be channelled; without the possibility of an elemental reaction people could not survive.

Human and non-human forces are married to each other in an inter-dependent system. This inter-dependency is expressed through the various uses to which the house is put: to order descent relations, for domestic use, and to provide an arena for the 'life-giving' elemental reaction. This is why houses (or more accurately Fertiles/Big-Houses) are so important: they can accommodate competing representations with ease. It is the housing of competing, but inter-dependent, ideas within the house that makes the ritual of the 'raising-up' of the *panjaka* meaningful. Without houses to mediate between them non-human fertility and human fertility would remain separate and any attempt to integrate them would be futile.

Endnotes

1. In the Abinal/Malzac dictionary '*Zanahary*' is translated as 'Dieu' [God] or 'createur' [creator]. However Bloch's treatment of the word is more in accordance with my approach: he talks about how the *Zafimaniry* interpret '*Zanahary*' as the amoral and capricious environment [cf Bloch 1995a; 1995b].
2. "Being a person entails resisting a total inward collapse, that is, resisting the rejection of all material or social connexion with the outer world. Thus, exchange and taboo, openness and closure, engagement and resistance, must be understood conjointly. Taboos help to regulate the boundaries of inner and outer worlds. They provide a concrete and material means to carve out and connect personal and social spaces and to grant such spaces the legitimacy offered by both objectified public rules and immediate bodily experience" [Lambek 1992:262].
3. Earth, water, and wind are the key elements that people constantly refer to in a variety of contexts; everything else is referred to with reference to them. I single out this trinity of elements because they are the elements around which life is thought to be centred; without them life would be impossible; as one *panjaka* said: "There must be earth, there must be water, there must be wind; if there is not we will die" [*tany misy sinitra, rano misy sinitra, rivotra misy sinitra; laha tsy'sy ho faty*].
4. I use the word 'orientation' in a general sense here because although both people and things have an 'orientation', the 'orientation' of people, animals, birds, and insects is far more active and self-aware than the passive, unselfconscious 'orientation' (perhaps better termed 'code') of trees, crops, stones and other objects. The major distinction between these two sets is that people, animals, birds and insects have a '*fanahy*' whereas trees, crops, stones and other objects do not. The two sets are, however, not categorically different because there is no clear demarcation made between them as living and non-living things: a tree is alive in the same sense as a bird is alive. To what extent something is living is therefore not directly correlated with its self-awareness/active nature. What we have is two overlapping paradigms, one concerned with 'aliveness' and the other concerned with 'active self-awareness'. If we combine the two paradigms we get what I have termed 'orientation', which is a slightly blurred concept.
5. See Thomas' work [1996] on the *Temanambondro* where he talks of the river estuary beside which they live as a 'great root'.
6. The presence of the ancestors in the water jealously guarding the cords of their descendants makes it a dangerous place for strangers to go. The water is infused with their power. For example when an Antaisaka man washed his face in a Tevongo pool, his face was scarred as if he had been washing in battery acid not water. Localised prohibitions must be respected: for the Tevongo pork and black pots (which may have contained pork) should not come into contact with the water because they are taboo [*fady*] to the ancestors that live in it. To flout such a ban would anger the ancestors and provoke retribution.
7. A 20 *ariary* coin which is likened to genuine silver money of the past.
8. The association between humans and rice, their parallel life-processes and their inter-dependence are all made apparent in other contexts also. A particularly revealing case is that of the preparation of, and prohibitions surrounding, storm medicine [*aodim-baratra*]. Both humans and rice are thought to be very vulnerable to the dangers of thunder [*godo/varatra*], lightning [*tsetatra*] and hail [*havandra*] in the hot, wet season [*asara*] from November to March and must therefore be protected by special medicine [*fundemy*] prepared by the medicine-man [*ombiasy*]. Humans may be killed by lightning or their houses set alight, whilst rice is easily flattened [*apotiky ny vary*] and so spoiled (it rots in the water) by a violent hail shower. In order to guard against these dangers the *panjaka* will summon all his subjects to the Big-House at the start of the stormy season. Here the medicine-man prepares his protection [*fiarovana*] by mixing a special leaf [*ravin-kazo*] with water [*rano*]. This concoction is known as the '*fundemy*' [storm medicine] and must be drunk three times [*inomina intelo*] by each person and then poured on the head [*fahaefatra amin'ny loha*]. This all takes place outside the Big-House beside the sharpened ceremonial post [*fatora*] to the east. This post is topped by the red feathers of the male

'fody' (or red chicken feathers if these are unavailable), a bird which is famed for thieving rice from the paddy. After the medicine has been drunk the 'fandemy' is mixed with 'white earth' [tany fotsy], and 'living embers' [harimbelo]; it is then daubed [midebiky] on everyone's bodies; on the forehead [panda], behind the ears [ambadika ravi-sofina], on the chest [tratra], on and behind the knees [indohalika sy lafera], and on the soles of the feet [fela tomboky]. Once this is completed an appeal is made to 'Zanahary' to spare the people and the crops. The people and the crops are now protected as long as certain taboos [fady] are respected: for the next three days no rice may be harvested, no spade or axe carried, no work done, and no basket-fishing [asidy] carried out in the rice-paddies. The connection between humans and rice is clear: not only are they both vulnerable, they are both protected through the same process. The irony is that for both to remain unharmed the inter-dependency must be temporarily suspended.

9. Talking of the Shambaai Kingdom of Tanzania Feierman recounts how the king is referred to as the 'owner of the land': "Only if all the wealth of the land was put into the hands of the king, as though his own, would he bring rain and food. A nineteenth-century proverb has it that the king cannot be bribed; you have nothing with which to bribe him, for all the wealth is his" [Feierman 1996:46].

10. See Atkinson [1989:14] on how shamanic ritual amongst the Wana of Sulawesi "rather than being a neat reflection of pre-existing social relations, in a real sense constitutes them".

11. Since the territories of each Belly do in fact overlap this interpretation is slightly imperfect. In theory only the Old-Woman, who undeniably rules the whole clan territory, should be able to represent the land. However, in the eyes of the people, the Earth-Shakers, who are almost in the same position, possess this quality also.

12. In this section I have talked about how the Earth-Shaker is like the land. It should not be forgotten that Minders of the One House are also like the land, just to a lesser extent. The transition from Fathers through Minders of the One House to Earth-Shakers is gradual and not clear cut. Different characteristics are exaggerated at each end of the scale, with a sliding transition in between.

13. The idea of harnessing the 'force of the environment' is not unique to the land of Sahafatra alone in Madagascar. Of particular note is the striking resemblance between the source of power accessed by the 'raising-up' of the *panjaka* and the source of power accessed in the 'bilo' possession ceremonies practised by the *Bara* peoples to the west. The 'bilo', as described by Huntington [1988:113-118], harnesses the force of natural growth prominent at springtime when fresh pasture emerges and green shoots sprout. As with the 'raising-up' of the *panjaka* humans access non-human fertility for their own ends. This similarity between the 'bilo' and the '*sandratra panjaka*' may not simply be a coincidence; it is interesting that present-day *Bara*-land is where many of the clans of *Sahafatra* are said to originate from. It may therefore be justifiable to posit a historical cultural connection between the practices. A connection appears even more likely if we examine the word '*sandratra*' more closely: I have translated '*sandratra*' as 'raising-up' with reference to the artificially elevated status of the *panjaka*. It may however also refer to the 'raising-up' of the 'force of the environment' from the land, making it even more directly comparable with the 'bilo'. This interpretation is made very plausible by the use of the word '*sandratse*' in southwest Madagascar: '*sandratse*' (which is a dialectical variation of '*sandratra*') is used in that part of the island to describe ceremonies explicitly referred to as 'bilo'.

14. This is an interesting divergence from the common-place ethnographic examples in which mediums are possessed by royal spirits [cf Lan 1985:44-71 for a case in point]. What we have here is a significant variation: a royal figure is possessed by an impersonal entity.

15. The Earth-Shaker generates general fertility by promoting rice-production unlike many leaders in East Africa who generate fertility by being rainmakers [cf Feierman 1996; Lan 1985].

16. *Zanahary* can be reached in other ways but not under control as when the *panjaka* is raised up. When, for example, the storm-medicine is made and the medicine-man [*ombiasy*] appeals for clemency there is immediately great danger. Although the intercession is thought to be efficacious in the long-term the immediate reaction of '*Zanahary*', which is said to have been 'touched' [*tsapaina Zanahary*], is to brew up a violent storm. The medicine-man does his best to calm the storm by keeping the medicine [*fandemy*] away from the fire (the

two coming together are thought to cause explosions [*mipoaka*]), by spraying [*afafy*] it around the village and around the cattle pen, and by shouting appeasement ("*mora mora avao*") but it is not really in his power to contain the storm.

17. See Atkinson [1989: 14-15]: "Wana shamans derive their power from extra-societal sources, but to succeed as shamans they must bring personal powers back from the peripheries to the heart of the community".

18. This is unlike systems in which an ancestral order is in part constituted by denigrating the biological role of women in reproduction [cf Bloch 1982; 1987a on the *Merina* case].

Chapter 8

Funerary and commemorative practices

After the death of a *panjaka*

The aim of this final chapter is to show how a senior *panjaka* remains important even after his death. Although the individual leader has died his body, the embodiment of what he has achieved, remains. Not only must the body be disposed of safely in the tomb, it must also be used to reify, and thus make endure, the values that the senior *panjaka* stood for during life.

In the first section I will examine the death and burial of senior *panjaka*. I will show how once a senior *panjaka* has died his body becomes a valuable that must be protected and safely connected to the land. By connecting the ruler to the land the people also connect themselves to the land thereby justifying their continued existence there and making it easier to access fertility for themselves in the future [cf Lan 1985:32 on royal ‘mhondoro’ spirits in Zimbabwe becoming the source of the fertility of the land itself].

In the second section I will show how festivals commemorating *panjaka* help maintain the whole set of values that powers the *panjaka* system. It will become clear that although individual *panjaka* come and go and ceremonies change, the idea of what a *panjaka* is remains constant.

Section 1: the death and burial of *panjaka*

The death and burial of a *panjaka* is always a troublesome and worrying business¹. The people of *Sahafatra* choose to deal with this problem by hiding the whole event, and pretending it is not going to happen until it is already all over [for a direct equivalent cf Feierman 1996: 46 on the Shambaai of Tanzania]. The key feature of any *panjaka*'s funeral is, therefore, that it should be shrouded in secrecy. The more senior the *panjaka* the more the secrecy is stressed and enforced. It is therefore very common to only find out that a senior *panjaka* has died days after his death, when the burial and selection of a new leader has already safely taken place.

The most immediately apparent aspect of this secrecy is that *panjaka* are buried in darkness [cf Feeley-Harnik 1986:170 for equivalent *Sakalava* royal burial]. Earth-Shakers are buried in the pitch black of the 'middle of the night' [*antsasak-ali*] (about 12 o'clock); Minders of the One House are buried at the time known as 'frog croak' [*maneno boketra*] (about 2am); and Fathers are buried as it is getting light at 'cock crow' [*maneno akoho*]. When I asked why *panjaka* had to be buried during the night the most common answer was that no-one, especially not strangers, should see. When I pressed people and asked them to explain why this should be so I received two types of answer. The first type of answer outlined how it had been like in the past in order to explain why people behave as they do now. I was told that *panjaka* were buried at night and in secret to prevent the body being stolen by hostile enemies [*nangalaran'fahavalo*]. People had been frightened of the consequences of losing the body. The second type of answer simply stated that people 'felt acute shame' [*tena menatra*] if any 'outsiders' [*vahiny*] (ie people not regarded as close kin or clan representatives) saw the body.

The first type of answer was easily developed and elucidated upon. People were worried about the body being lost because without it the owners were said to be 'lost' [very] and symbolically 'defeated by their enemies' [*ravan'olo-kafa*] without there even being a fight. This was because when enemies [*fahavalo/dahalo*] stole a body in the past they made it unrecoverable by throwing it [*avalany*] into a river where it would be 'eaten by crocodiles' [*hanim-boay*]². Without the body of their leader to attach to the land through burial in the tomb the people lost their moral authority over the land; they were no longer 'owners' [*tsy tena tompony*] and were therefore

obliged to admit defeat [*resy ny tana laha very ny fatim-panjaka*]. The probability of the body being lost was increased by the fact that the people became 'soft' and 'vulnerable' [*malemby*] in the period of interregnum immediately after the death of a senior *panjaka* ³. They were not strong enough to resist physical attacks because, they said, they had 'lost their head' [*very loha*]; they therefore tried to maintain secrecy instead.

The historical importance of the proper disposal of the *panjaka* goes some way to explaining why people are particularly sensitive and frightened of tomb thieves or 'bone robbers' [*pangala tola*] now. We were never allowed to go anywhere near a tomb and only good friends would even dare point them out to us. It is precisely because tomb raiding is not a modern phenomenon (even though the current trend is to accuse white foreigners of taking bones from tombs as a cure for AIDS ⁴) but a very traditional trial of strength that this pervasive fear remains. The important element of 'fear' stressed by the people of *Sahafatra* made me wonder why it was nominally 'shame' that they actually said they felt. However much I tried it was hard to get to the root of why people were 'ashamed' [*menatra*] of the visibility of the corpse of the *panjaka*. On interrogation informants never gave the impression that they were describing an abstract notion; rather they would come up with concrete examples of circumstances that produced 'shame'. To them the emotion of 'shame' did not have a uniform underlying theme but consisted instead of the living out of particular uncomfortable instances.

So where did the elusive and obscure idea of 'shame' concerning the dead bodies of senior *panjaka* come from? As we have seen people were unable (rather than unwilling, I think) to help elucidate the matter; as far as they were concerned they just 'felt ashamed' [*menatra*] in certain circumstances. They could not explain why and when pressed would return to the story of the bandits stealing the bodies. This made me think that 'shame' was a particular cultural manifestation of 'fear'; 'shame' was another aspect of the secrecy surrounding, and denial of, the event actually happening (ie the burial of the *panjaka*). 'Fear', which implied weakness, could not be admitted and was repressed. However a disturbing emotion was still present; 'fear' was therefore transformed into the tangible and admissible emotion of 'shame'. 'Shame' impelled people to act in the required safe way but circumvented the problem of admitting 'fear'.

Posthumous promotion: ruling when dead

A notable consequence of the 'shame' felt when burying a *panjaka* in daylight is that people are impelled to try and posthumously promote their dead relatives so that the funeral can be carried out more privately in the darkness of deepest night. This practice is culturally sanctioned in certain cases and is known as '*manjaka-maty*' which means 'ruling when dead'. This practice essentially only applies to Fathers [*panjaka tsotra*] who can be promoted in status to a Minder of the One House ⁵ after they have died, making an important difference to their time of burial. The family of the dead man must pay at least one cow for the promotion but are normally more than willing to do so because they are 'ashamed' at the thought that a child may see the body otherwise [*menatra laha sambain 'zaza madinika hafa*]. If the burial is in the daytime there will inevitably be lots of onlookers; promotion buys one the right to a true nighttime burial and fewer bystanders.

General procedure for burial of senior *panjaka*

Although I have never witnessed the burial of a senior *panjaka*, for the obvious reasons of secrecy outlined above, I have been given many graphic descriptions of such funerals and therefore feel able to provide an accurate account of the general procedure to be followed at such events. The fact that I attended many ordinary funerals ⁶ and listened to the contrasts drawn between them and the funerals of senior *panjaka* has allowed me to put the knowledge I acquired orally into a proper context. The opportunity to participate in the funeral of a much-loved ex-senior *panjaka* ⁷ whose funeral, I was told, was carried out in exactly in the same way as for a real senior *panjaka* (except for the fact that the body was allowed to be disposed of in daylight) also provided valuable data, as did chance encounters with funeral processions across the countryside. The description I give below is garnered from all these experiences; it specifically concerns the funerals of senior *panjaka* but reference is made to ordinary funerals in order to demonstrate how the two types are actively made distinct from one another.

When a senior *panjaka* dies there is an immediate sense of urgency. The people organising the

funeral have to deal with conflicting priorities: on the one hand the burial must be completed as quickly [*maika be*] and secretly as possible; on the other hand certain people outside of the village (close relatives and clan leaders) should be present along with the members of the deceased's Big-House. The normal procedure is a compromise between the two priorities (although the more senior the *panjaka* the more secrecy will be favoured). The compromise is achieved by informing relevant parties outside the village but by doing so quickly, so as not to have to delay too long, and under a strict code of secrecy, so as no strangers should hear.

Panjaka outside the village should be officially informed ⁸ by means of a messenger [*iraka*]. Once inside the Big-House the messenger quietly announces the death of the senior *panjaka* without ceremony or drama; the *panjaka* receiving the messenger takes the news calmly, declares that he has understood by saying "You have made it heard" [*nahare ianao*], and then dismisses the messenger without further ado or comment. *Panjaka* should never come to hear the news of the death through the spread of gossip. If a *panjaka* does arrive from a different town having heard the news on the grapevine, through the talk of women and children, then the 'master of the corpse' [*tompon-paty*] is punished and 'fined' [*voasazy*] for his indiscretion.

While appropriate outsiders are being informed and are rushing to the village lest they are too late and miss the corpse, the members of the deceased's Big-House organise the arrangements in the village. As has already been discussed the body must be buried quickly and with the minimum possible fuss. There should not be a 'lot of noise' [*tabataba-be*] because the family would be 'ashamed' if any undesirable outsiders heard and turned up before the event was completed.

The laying-out of the body

The Big-House is the place where the body of an ordinary person (a subject) would be put; however the body of a senior *panjaka* may not be laid out in his own home (the Big-House). This is because the Big-House is the 'place where strangers are received' [*trano-famantanam-bahiny*]; if the body were to be put there a stranger might see it and steal it, or report it to others

who would do the same. Even if the stranger did not see the body he would have to be diverted somewhere else and would suspect that something was wrong. To avoid this danger the *Antsoro* clan operate a special strategy: when a senior *panjaka* dies his body is temporarily hidden while human decoys are placed in the Big-House to give the impression that life there is continuing as normal; in addition a fire is lit inside in order to provide a literal and metaphorical smoke-screen convincing passers-by that there is nothing amiss. Standard practice among the other clans is a little less elaborate: the body of the *panjaka* is simply put in a small non-descript house ‘behind’ [*ambadika*] his own. Ideally this house should be well out of the way and not on any major access routes.

This little house ‘behind’ [*ambadika*] is designated as the ‘women’s house’ [*tranom-biavy*]. The body is cleaned, dressed and moved in here; once this has been done no more men may enter. They gather in another ordinary house, known as the ‘men’s house’ [*tranon-delahy*], to hold council; meanwhile the women continue to tend to the body. If the *panjaka* has completed his duties with honour over the years he is thought to have earned his ceremonial ‘*soto-mena*’ (previously the property of the people); in this case he is dressed in the ceremonial headgear along with his ceremonial robe [*lamba mena*] for the burial.

When women arrive to see the body they come to the ‘women’s house’ [*tranom-biavy*]. After they enter they are only allowed to cry very briefly lest they attract too much attention or lest any children should hear; then they must stifle their moans of grief as they are urged to be quiet [*mangina!*]. The women are offered water to drink in order to comfort them and in order to make them silent. Whatever happens they must not lose control and weep loudly, however sad they are. It is this that is said to separate out the body of the *panjaka* from that of ordinary people; at ordinary funerals women wail long and loud and can be heard from afar. The wife of the dead *panjaka* [*tompon-bady*] is not allowed to stay in the ‘women’s house’ [*tranom-biavy*] even if she is perceived to be well-behaved and ‘sweet natured’ [*mamy*]; this is because of the anticipated danger of her over-reacting and breaking down. The people less emotionally affected by the death, on the other hand, have no sense of reverence. It is normal for them to chat quietly and even crack jokes; women unembarrassedly take chewing tobacco [*paraky*] from the container already tucked into the mat wrapped around the corpse for their own consumption.

Debt [*trosa*] at the death of a *panjaka*

One of the reasons why the funeral should be attended by key people is that all the ‘debts’ [*trosa*] of the dead *panjaka* must be sorted out before the final burial can take place. When I am talking about ‘debts’ I mean specifically those things owing to people within the same Big-House and same Belly [*troki*] (the burial group as such) as the deceased. These ‘debts’ must be resolved before the body can enter the tomb [*kibory*]. Some of these ‘debts’ are merely financial. The representative of the family of the dead *panjaka* must pay the required amounts back without delay; he usually does this by shifting the debt to outsiders who are not implicated in the burial process. Outsiders do not try and prevent the body entering the tomb in the same way as family members who are owed do.

Another type of ‘debt’ is ritual debt. When the anticipated time of burial is close there must be a debate [*kabaro*]. The senior subjects of the deceased *panjaka*, known as the ‘body of men’ [*vatan-delahy*] (of which the *panjaka* was ‘head’), and the ‘warriors’ [*panabaka*] gather in order to decide whether the *panjaka* has left unfinished business, by which I mean unpaid dues. For example, if a *panjaka* has been raised up five times [*indimy nasandratra ny panjaka*] but has not provided the ritual dues on each occasion he is now liable to pay the outstanding sum. If he did not give what is known as a ‘crown cow’ [*aomby soto*] to be sacrificed each time he was ‘raised-up’ in the past then he must make up the deficit now. Thus if a *panjaka* was raised up five times but was only able to contribute a cow on three occasions then two are still owing.

The reason the debt must be paid is straightforward: no-one, especially a *panjaka*, should get something for nothing. What I call the ‘ghost cows’ (ie those the *panjaka* was allowed to have on credit and on trust) allowed the *panjaka* to ‘take root’ [*nangala fototra*] as a ruler; now he (or rather the family he has left behind) must pay for that privilege. The person responsible for the payment is the ‘master of the kin’ [*tompon-kava*] who is the senior representative of the family. Whatever the deficit is he must pay or ‘vomit’ [*mandoa*] it; the cows are offered up to the ‘body of men’ and the ‘warriors’ who divide them up and consume them hungrily. If the ‘master of the kin’ does not have the required number of cows at his disposal he must use whatever means are necessary (however drastic) to obtain them. The shortfall must be made up even if it involves

begging, borrowing or stealing. The expense of this will eventually be shared out among the family. However in the immediate short-term this is irrelevant; it is only when the cows are 'seen' [*ahitana*] that the body can be disposed of.

The importance of debt

The demand that all debts be dealt with is what makes funerals hard and contentious [*sarotra*]. The process of burial is a difficult time when relatives demand that debts be repaid; money and cattle move outwards from the immediate family in order to satisfy the more distant kin within the burial group. From the point of view of Monsieur *Ah Tang*, one of the Chinese/Malagasy traders in *Vondrozo*, people are taking advantage of the misfortune of death to profit ["Ca profite!"] at other people's expense. He knows how difficult the situation is because he sees financial negotiations going on in his shop and perpetually has people asking to borrow money from him in order to satisfy funeral debts. However in a way his perception of affairs misses the point.

The repayment of debts at the death of a *panjaka* is simply a re-appropriation of funds that never really belonged to the deceased in the first place. Credit was given to the *panjaka* with the expectation that he would make it up. Death leads to a final accountability; all debts (everyday and ritual) must be paid off by the immediate family before the corpse can enter the tomb. The immediate family has to complete what the *panjaka* failed to do. The critical point is that the *panjaka* misused his wealth during life: his wealth should have been directed towards the people but was instead used for his own personal ends. He allowed himself to be glorified without keeping his end of the bargain. This is why people are so vehement and insistent about repayment. It is not venial desires that are served; rather it is justice that is sought. If a *panjaka* gets away with not paying his dues then the whole system, which balances the giving of wealth with the right to respect, is undermined.

This is why debt at death cannot be countenanced. Debts are uncomfortable in life but they are accepted as a way of bonding and demonstrating kinship. In death debts become more

problematic and divide people; *panjaka* come to the end of their credit limit and the spiritual bailiffs, so to speak, come calling round to correct the improper use of funds and to redress the imbalance within the burial group. There is an interesting clash of priorities here: on the one hand to retain any sort of validity *panjaka* must be seen to pay their debts in full; on the other hand what is most important is to get the *panjaka* safely into the tomb as quickly as possible thereby guaranteeing the continued connection of the burial group to the land. This clash is never resolved but is expressed in the tension felt by everyone at the funeral of a *panjaka*.

To reduce this tension special attention is paid to the proper ‘arrangement’ and ‘sameness’ of people. At a funeral everything (as we have seen with debt) should be properly arranged. Money is sorted out, only appropriate kin are invited as guests etc. The sense of arrangement is expressed in the word for the food distributed at funerals: this food is known as the ‘*lahatry*’ which means ‘properly arranged’. The serving of this food is an indicator that everything is in order. There is also a collection of money made at the funeral. The sum given is a nominally agreed amount⁹. This monetary contribution which is known as the ‘*fitovisa*’ (from ‘*mitovy*’ meaning ‘same’) is said to ‘make everybody equal’ [*mahamitovy*] and of the ‘same kind’ [*mitovy karaza*]. Everyone who wants to be thought of as a member of the burial group must give the ‘*fitovisa*’. It is another aspect of the re-grouping and equalling out that is going on at a funeral.

The final burial: ‘throwing away the animal’

When all the wrangles have been dealt with the time comes at some time in the night for the body to leave the town. Everybody is silent as one of the ‘body of men’ [*vatan-delahy*] bids farewell and ‘begs leave’ [*mamatoky*] of the corpse. The body of the *panjaka* is removed from the house via the opening in the east wall (as opposed to normal people who exit via the west) and is placed on a bier constructed out of freshly cut wood. At this point people are unable to contain their crying. As the body is being prepared to be taken away the realisation strikes that the *panjaka* is now just a dead body. Like ordinary people he can no longer have any friends and is reduced to the status of a ‘*biby*’. A ‘*biby*’ is a wild animal, associated with the dangerous antisocial world of the wild country outside of villages [cf Lan 1985:39 on the lion spirits of the royal ancestors

in Zimbabwe for an interesting comparison]; a 'biby' is however something which is also associated by the people of *Sahafatra*, like the *Karembola*, with the 'supernatural' [cf Middleton 1988:454-455]. The *panjaka* thus becomes not only something alien that should be placed beyond the boundaries of the village but also something 'extraordinary'; he is a different kind of thing now, still powerful and dangerous, but of a 'different nature' [*lasa toetra hafa*]. His threatening nature makes it imperative that the body is properly disposed of, an activity known by the people as 'throwing away the animal' [*manary biby*]. He is outside human social relations now and is on his way to the tomb where he will become part of the wider, amoral and capricious, environment [cf Simonse 1992:396-397 on kings turning into divinity at the end of their victimary career].

When the body leaves the house it is obvious to everyone that a *panjaka* is being buried because of the timing and the eastward exit. To prevent comment practical measures must be taken to ensure that no outsiders see, especially women and children because they are thought to be crazy and irresponsible talkers [*molan-d-roho*]. Stones are thrown [*tori-bato*] at all the houses to keep people inside; if some children should still happen to chance by sand is thrown in their eyes on purpose [*tarahina fasi kinehina*] to blind them and send them scuttling home to bed. Finally, when the coast is thought to be clear, the body can leave. The funeral bearers, made up of the male and female 'warriors' [*panabaka*], start the dark journey towards the final destination and resting place of the *panjaka*, in the tomb ¹⁰.

The journey to the tomb

The 'warriors' [*panabaka*] are the only type of people thought to be 'vital' [*mahery*] enough to withstand the rigours of accompanying the body to the tomb ¹¹. The troop of 'panabaka', made up of boys and girls, is necessarily wild and unruly to resist the infecting influence brought on by the proximity to the body. The boys are the ones actually carrying the bier while the girls mill around them. They are all shouting, screaming and laughing as they stampede down the narrow paths, running and making way for no-one. Everyone is very physical, boys fighting with each other and pinching the girls when they come in range ¹². There comes a point on the journey

when certain of the carriers must turn back. There are certain ‘outsiders’ [*vahiny*] who are required to carry the body but who are not a member of the same burial group (‘sister’s sons’ [*zanak’anakavy*] and ‘sons-in-law’ [*vinanto*]¹³ of the deceased). When they reach a certain point near the tomb they drop out and return to the village because they must not discover exactly where the tomb is.

The female ‘*panabaka*’ stop at this point also but they do not return to the village; they wait for the male ‘*panabaka*’ to finish the job and rejoin them. By this stage the girls are looking wild; many of their clothes have been discarded so they are scantily clad; their hair is also unbraided and let down to hang loosely. A cow, which is the payment for the ‘*panabaka*’, is slaughtered here by the boys before they continue on to the tomb; this is why that particular spot is known as the place where the ‘bad meat is broiled’ [*fitono-henan-dratsy*]¹⁴. While the boys prepare to depart once more the girls set to dividing the meat up for the party which will commence when the main body of the party returns from the tomb.

The male insider ‘*panabaka*’ (members of the same Belly [*troki*] as the deceased) carry on, but double back as soon as they are out of sight so as to dupe the ‘strangers’ [*vahiny*] as to the actual whereabouts of the tomb. They then continue up to the entrance of the tomb itself which is hidden amongst the huge boulders scattered around the top of the ridge. Even the ‘warriors’ are afraid of the tomb and only the bravest will go in. They must take their clothes off before entering and then wash thoroughly in water before putting them back on afterwards. Contamination in the tomb is avoided by going naked and by cleansing ones self of death afterwards. The cleansing is particularly necessary because the actual interment is very messy: when a new body is put in the tomb it is put underneath all the others of its kind. This is to stop contamination of the other bodies by the polluting ‘dirt’ [*loto*] and ‘blood’ [*ra*] of the freshly deceased seeping through. It also removes the need to bury the body outside the tomb first [*tsy mila mandevy aloha*], makes the body more inaccessible [*sarotra mangala*] and connects it more directly with the earth [*mahafototra*].

The ‘*soto-mena*’ goes into the tomb with the *panjaka*; it is a sign of individual achievement and is not handed on. It has been earned through the trial of life as a *panjaka* and the repayment of

any outstanding debts. The '*soto-mena*' is initially the property of the people but becomes more and more associated with the *panjaka* over time. Thus when a respected *panjaka* dies he takes his headgear with him; the new *panjaka* must be presented with new ceremonial headgear. When the body has been placed in the correct position, with various tributes placed around it, the '*panabaka*' leave the tomb and reseal it by sliding closed the massive stone door. They return to where the female '*panabaka*' are waiting and a wild party begins. Some reliable messengers are sent to report back to the village.

Tombs

In general there is one large communal tomb for the descendants of each Great Ancestor [*razambe*]. Thus if a clan has three Great Ancestors there will be three clan tombs [*kibory*]. Each communal tomb is divided up into three parts: one for women in the south-west, one for ordinary men in the north-west, and one for *panjaka* in the east. The remains of *panjaka* may be put in 'caskets' or 'coffins' [*vata*] belonging to their Belly [*troki*] once they have dried out; (the occasion of another funeral is used as an opportunity to move the bones).

The idea of any of the tombs ever becoming full seems ludicrous to the people as the tombs are huge and the bodies rot away into the earth. This does not mean however that there are in fact only three tombs. Anyone who has the desire and the means has the right to build a separate tomb for themselves and their descendants while remaining affiliated to their Great Ancestor. However to build a tomb is no easy feat; those that do not manage it are by default buried in their communal tomb and fail to mark themselves out as separate and worthy of note. Those that do manage to build a separate tomb are people who are thought to 'increase themselves' [*maharonga tena*]. They have to be a particularly productive type of person because, as people say, 'thirty cows doesn't finish a tomb' [*aomby telopolo tsy mahavita kibory*]. It takes so many cows for two reasons: firstly building a respectable-sized tomb, something in the region of 10 metres by 10 metres, is a monumental task; and secondly people make it particularly difficult on purpose (no-one is willing to help unless they are paid exorbitant wages; the work must be done by 'outsider' masons being paid danger money etc). As in life where *panjaka* must pay the price

for being singled out, so in planning for death one must be made to pay for having the temerity to try and be different. A few people may achieve the task but for many their ambition and their striving for separateness will be their ruin.

The ‘sitting-up’ and the ‘crying over the mat’

When the assigned ‘*panabaka*’ come back to the village empty handed the people cry again; the separation is complete. The people ask how it went [*akory aby e nengaha tany*] and the messengers reply that they have finished the bad business and returned [*tany da nahavita ratsy da nipody*]; that is all as there is nothing else to say. It is at this point that word is officially sent out to all [*mampandre*] informing them of the death of the *panjaka*. On hearing the news people come as quickly as possible to attend the ‘*andry-faty*’, a sort of ‘waiting on the dead’. They bring gifts of food (or equivalent money), known as ‘*lahatry*’, and tribute in the form of ceremonial cloths [*lamba*], hats and pieces of clothing. Each Big-House of the Belly of the deceased should present at least one ceremonial cloth.

People arriving at this time are in a sense already too late as the body has long gone [*efa lasa efa ela*]. If they had a close connection to the dead *panjaka* or respected him they are particularly upset to have missed the body and collapse ‘weeping over the mat’ [*mitomany lafika*] that wrapped the body of their dead kinsman. The secrecy and speed of the burial means that there are many disappointed mourners. For the people of *Sahafatra* to ‘cry over the mat’ [*mitomany lafika*] is a common and painful occurrence. The close relatives of the dead who attended the whole funeral ‘sit-up’ [*midoboky*] to wait for and comfort the late arrivals.

Section 2: ‘*andry-faty*’ and standing stones

The formation of dynasties

As we have seen at the death of a *panjaka* all debts must be repaid. Once this has been done a family may choose to ‘promote’ the deceased family member. If after this there is still wealth left over the family will hold another lavish ceremony to demonstrate that it is not finished or ‘used-up’ [*lany*]. This ceremony, known as the ‘*andry-faty*’ (which literally means ‘waiting on the dead’), is a statement of intent designed to demonstrate that despite the death of the *panjaka* his immediate family remains powerful. By sponsoring an expensive ritual the family shows that it still has the means to rule. This is in effect how informal dynasties are formed; if a family, after fulfilling its obligations, still maintains and displays great wealth then this influences the choice of the next leader. A family promotes and enhances the chances of one of its own members being selected by making public its continuing strength (measured in terms of cattle ownership).

The ‘*andry-faty*’ is a festival to remember a dead *panjaka* and if possible (ie if there is the will and enough money) to raise a commemorative ‘standing stone’ [*tsangam-bato*] to him. If there are the means the ‘*andry-faty*’ will take place as a continuation of the funeral; however if there is not immediately enough money the event may be held up to several years after the death. ‘*Andry-faty*’ are closely associated with *panjaka* which is why everyone is keen to hold one for their relatives. In the land of *Sahafatra* ‘there is no secondary burial’ [*tsy misy famadihana*] (cf Bloch 1971:138-171 for details of *Merina* secondary burial); people say that they ‘wait on the dead’ [*manao andry-faty*] instead. Dealing with the dead affects the living but without the danger and disruption of removing the body from the tomb [cf Feeley-Harnik 1986:170-171 for discussion of ‘hot’ (dangerous) and ‘cold’ (life-giving) funeral ceremonies].

Understanding standing stones

The current ‘*andry-faty*’ is the modern day equivalent to the ‘raising up of stones’ [*fanangam-bato*] which was more commonly practised in the past. According to the people themselves

'*andry-faty*' and stone raising can be directly equated; they are essentially the same thing expressed in a different way. In the past when a great *panjaka* died his wealth would be used up raising stones to commemorate him. Each stone had to be 'dragged' [*itarihana*] and 'raised up' [*atsanga*] by men. This is why it was known as the '*mirori-bato*' which meant the 'fixing of the stone'. Many men pulled the stones from their resting places (they were not worked stone but stone found in its natural state) to the selected site. When they tired and had to rest a cow had to be slaughtered to feed them in payment. Then they pulled again until once more they were unable to continue; another cow was killed and so on for each stop. Thus the number of stones actually raised depended upon the available bovine wealth of the dead *panjaka* [*noho izany ny isan-bato arakaraka ny vola fananana*]. When the stones were finally raised up and 'fixed' [*orina*] in the ground they were smeared with the fatty grease of all the dead cattle to show the 'richness' [*matavy*] of the dead *panjaka*.

Each collection of stones you see atop a hillside today in *Sahafatra* is commemorating just one such person [*olon-dehibe iraiky avao*]. The number of stones, placed at a favourite and highly visible spot associated with the dead person, is a gauge of their fortune and greatness [cf Graeber 1995:271 for an alternative interpretation of *Merina* tombs as memorials to powerful individuals]. Most of the stones that were erected up to 150 years ago are still standing proud and seem to have been there forever. They litter the landscape; they are mildewed and mossy and often shadowed by trees that have sprung up around them. In a world where things tend not to stay visible they are remarkably permanent. Houses are dismantled, the wood is sold and the remnants rot away as they are quickly overtaken by new growth; no signs are left and the place where the house stood becomes a distant and invisible memory. Standing stones are different; they persist as enduring monuments to dead chieftains.

The grammar of remembrance

As one becomes older one gains fixedness at the expense of personal identity. This trend is exaggerated for *panjaka* who attain power but only by being incorporated by others. The death of a *panjaka* is the culmination of this fixing process; their fame and greatness may be 'fixed in

stone' [*orim-bato*] but there is nothing to remember them by personally, no writing on the stone to individually identify them. As an individual one can survive only as long as people's memories. A stone is less a memorial to a particular individual (who will be forgotten and extinguished in any case) and more a way of thinking representing a certain set of values. No one knows who the stones were raised to anymore but everyone understands their meaning.

It is particularly important to recognise how the erection of standing stones asserted power over people. Cows could perfectly well have been used to drag the stones and yet it was thought more appropriate and telling for humans to do it. Cattle were used to pay for and control human labour. Subjects acted as temporary 'slaves' [*andevo*], coerced by the sacrifice of cattle. However through their labour they 'freed themselves' [*nahafaka*] from the tyranny of a master by 'impoverishing him' [*mahalany panjaka*] and bringing him back down to the level of ordinary men [*olo tsotra*]. In a way the imbalance of power was only temporary as it is now.

Competition in the realm of death

Enforced equality in life (with *panjaka* as the exceptions proving the rule because they are elevated but are made to suffer for it) pushes competition into the realm of death. 'Promoting' a dead relative [*manjaka maty*] or raising standing stones are acts that cannot be undone and they indirectly reflect glory on the living. It is hard to gain this type of glory in any other way. Although competition in death allows one to gain intangible glory it also enforces financial equality by necessitating huge expenditure; those with money and cows are forced to give in a ferocious evening out.

Nowadays clusters of standing stones are never erected; it is rare for even a single stone to be put up. This is put down to the impossibility of following the rule that each time the men dragging the stone are tired a cow must be killed. People go on about how 'heavy' [*mavesatra*] the stones are to explain why they cannot carry on with the custom. No one has, or is prepared to use, the resources necessary for such an operation any more. I was told that people concentrated more on their responsibilities towards the living family. People are more concerned to look after their

children [*zanaka*] and grandchildren [*zafy*] than to sponsor stone-raising festivals .

However the idiom of standing stones has been transferred onto the '*andry-faty*', which has become an alternative trial of strength measured in money and cattle. At an '*andry-faty*' hundreds of people are invited to attend a festival celebrating the dead *panjaka*. The host family provides all the food (three rice meals a day and vast quantities of meat) along with expensive entertainment in the form of specialist dancers [*panao siry*]. These events last several days and involve immense expenditure. Wealth is used up to create glory, but it is used up in a different way to the past. In the past cattle were destroyed to earn the (slave) labour of subjects; now riotous parties are held, exercises in conspicuous consumption relying on the generosity of the sponsoring family.

The '*andry-faty*' at *Vohiljatsy* (clan *Vohilakatra*)

The '*andry-faty*' at *Vohiljatsy* was prompted by the death of a *panjaka* who was a very rich man with many head of cattle [*panarivo*]. According to custom he was buried very quickly and quietly without many people knowing. The first news of the death for many came after the actual burial and took the form of an invitation to the '*andry-faty*'. As I have already stated the burial of a *panjaka* should be very secret; however his '*andry-faty*' should be as public as possible and therefore involves much organisation and pre-planning.

The '*andry-faty*' is a long event lasting over 3 days, normally from a Thursday evening to a Sunday afternoon. The event is organised by the close family of the deceased *panjaka*; in this case the elder brother briefly took over. The preparations involve inviting representatives of all branches of the clan, buying enough food to feed all the guests over the whole period, organising entertainment, building a 'long-house' [*trano-lava*] (a sort of mini grandstand-like structure) for the important dignitaries to view proceedings from, supplying cattle to be sacrificed, deciding what village houses will be given over to the visitors to temporarily live, cook and sleep in ...

The announcement of the holding of an '*andry-faty*' immediately lays claim to power. It is a

demonstration of wealth by the family of the deceased *panjaka* and of their intention to ceremonially distribute it. This encourages the selection of another member of the same family (a close relative of the deceased) as the next *panjaka* because of the willingness of the family to prove itself worthy to rule by distributing wealth. The cost of death hastens the process of burning up extra wealth but it also ‘buys the right’ [*mividy zo*] for the family to continue its reign. This is what in fact happened in the case at *Vohiljatsy*; the son was ‘chosen’ [*fidina*] to replace his father and his raising up was incorporated into the ‘*andry-faty*’ itself.

The event: Thursday evening/night

On the Thursday evening family members began to gather in the host village. Many women were ‘crying over the mat’ [*mitomany lafika*] because they had missed the funeral of the old *panjaka*. People started to drink rum [*toaka*] and argued over who should be sent as messengers [*iraka*] to inform distant kin of the imminent festivities. The conch-shell [*antsiva*], which must normally remain silent unless there is a real emergency under threat of a fine, was blown continuously to mark the commencement of the festival. As the evening progressed there was rising excitement as the time approached for the ‘raising-up’ [*sandratra panjaka*] of the new *panjaka*. A mass of people assembled outside the Fertile and began to chant an incessant two note dirge. At this point the chant was basically without words, just an otherworldly, sinister background noise swelling and falling like a living thing or waves advancing and receding on the shore. The crying of women, still mourning the *ex-panjaka*, could be heard on top of this. It created a strange atmosphere, a mix of the funereal and the celebratory, reflecting the fact that the son was taking on the role of a celebrated father.

The new leader was being put in place directly in order that he should be able to direct affairs over the course of the next few days. This accounts for the unusual timing of the ‘raising-up’ in the middle of the night; it had to be finished before the bulk of the guests arrived. At the appointed hour (about 3am) the men surrounded the new *panjaka* and processed anti-clockwise three times around the Fertile lead by the conch-blower. The strange chanting continued but now instead of being wordless the men intoned “Father ...Father ... Father...” [*iaba*]. When the

perambulation was over the *panjaka* entered through the west door and everyone hammered on the walls. The women then proceeded to perambulate with the Royal Woman, all the while crying, wailing and chanting her title, "*Ampela....Ampela...*". After three times round the Fertile, led by the conch-blower, the Royal Woman entered the west door and the women hammered on the walls too. Inside the Fertile, the new *panjaka* in his 'soto-mena' and his ceremonial silk cloth [*lamba landy*], was officially 'raised-up' [*nasandraatra*]. The Eye of the Water called for a blessing and the new *panjaka* exited through the east door, accompanied by a drum roll on the sacred 'long-drum' [*hazolava*]. As he exited everyone was told to take their hats off. The *panjaka* called for blessing for all the ancestries [*raza*], asking for healthy children and the protection of the village, before moving down a human corridor to the long-house [*trano-lava*]. The female family remained in the Fertile with the Royal Woman, breaking into wailing and ululating wildly as the *panjaka* departed for the long-house.

The *panjaka* moved into the long-house and sat quietly in the northeast corner flanked by all his male supporters. This is where he would remain without moving or sleeping for the next three days orchestrating affairs and viewing the entertainments in the arena formed by the long-house the Fertile and the audience.

The funeral aspect

This was the spatial arrangement that was to last through the whole event: the women based in the Fertile and the men in the long-house. It is this arrangement that makes the '*andry-faty*' like a funeral without the body. The Fertile becomes the mock 'women's house' [*tranom-biavy*] and the long-house the 'men's house' [*tranon-delahy*]. Some informants called the whole event the *Sahafatra* equivalent of a secondary burial [*famadihana*] but one not risking the body to the predation of hostile outsiders. The fact that there is no body means that what is being acted out is in part a prototypical general death. The women say that they do not cry for just one person, they cry for all the dead. The '*andry-faty*' at *Vohiljatsy* was supposedly commemorating 13 specific people but most of those we asked could not come up with their names. It was more important to people to remember the nature of what they were commemorating (greatness) than

the specific people. Since nothing is inscribed in stone, nothing individual can be permanent and past leaders inexorably become a blurred mass. Thus the '*andry-faty*' is as much a celebration of a way of life, of the connection between generosity and power, as of particular individuals.

Boxing and the first feast

Soon after the *panjaka* exited the Fertile dawn broke and the '*andry-faty*' officially got underway. The first event was a type of boxing contest known as '*moraingy*'. Two opposing sides of young men formed, goading each other to provide an opponent. Most of the young men were already 'stinking drunk' [*maimbo toaka*] by this stage. The spectators formed a human ring around them; however if they encroached on the arena a vicious man, entrusted with keeping the space clear, beat them back with a stick. The event was accompanied by the same surging and receding drone that characterised the build up to the 'raising-up'. Once a volunteer came forward the droning stopped and the young man, backed by his side, challenged the opposing side to find someone to match him. "*O korao, mitady nama!*" they shouted: 'Come on boys, I'm looking for a friend!'

While the first volunteer remained alone in the ring, he strutted around, torso bared, puffing his chest out in a demonstration of strength and arrogance. He made the most of his glory as temporary champion and tried to intimidate further challengers. When finally a new opponent stepped forward, or was pushed, he stripped off his shirt and prepared to fight. The two competitors eyeballed and insulted each other as a referee positioned himself on the sidelines ready to decide the outcome of the bout. After the youths had circled each other a few times, sizing each other up, and looking for an avenue of attack, one rushed in with fists flailing.

In this sport the first to score a good blow is declared the winner so fights are normally over after two or three incredibly violent flurries of punches when the referee steps in to adjudicate a final verdict. However in the case we witnessed the competitors were unwilling to stop fighting, forcing their comrades to step in and separate them. The winner stayed in the arena scornfully mocking the rest of the young men. He was the champion until the moment another young man,



Women pound rice at the '*andry-faty*' (top); the boxing competition at dawn (bottom).

vying for prestige, dared to step forward. And so the fights continued to the roaring approval of the crowd until finally the situation was judged to be getting out of control and the *panjaka* ordered that combat be suspended.

The end of the fighting signalled the start of the first feast. The young men chased the first cow to be killed around the village, wrestling with it until they finally brought it down and tied it up in front of the Fertile. The cow was then sacrificed, cut up and divided. Meanwhile teams of women pounded vast quantities of rice as the misty morning vibrated with the sound of rhythmically thumping pestles. By this time many of the outside guests had arrived and been allocated houses. They would now be looked after for the rest of their stay. Food was delivered to them in their houses and they only had to venture forth to view the periodic entertainments. The sponsors of the '*andry-faty*' were busy organising everything for the passive visitors. As a guest, the idea was to consume as much as possible, to make oneself sick with eating rice and beef and drinking cane rum. The first food was doled out soon after daylight. The meat had been divided into fist sized chunks, boiled with salt, and then fried with oil. It dripped with fat. These juicy balls of meat, known as '*faha*', were first passed around the elders in the long-house; what was then left was fought over by the juniors who stood waiting, driven wild by the tantalising smell of the meat. They grabbed wildly for a piece of meat tearing bits from each others hands and stuffing them into their mouths.

The close male family of the *panjaka* presided over affairs in the long-house while the *panjaka* himself directed affairs, telling the Eye of the Water what he wanted done. The Eye of the Water then delegated specific duties to the women and the '*panabaka*'. The *panjaka*'s job was to calmly make sure that everyone got their share and that everything remained under control; this was strictly necessary as all present fought to get everything they could off the organisers. The young people literally scrapped for food and made vocal demands for more, perpetually complaining that there was not enough. The older guests did not explicitly demand things but rather they waited expectantly in their houses. They were the hardest of all to satisfy because, although they remained silent, there was never a moment when they felt they had been given enough.

All through the next three days food was continuously relayed to the guest-houses. Barely had one finished one meal when the next supplies arrived. White rice was delivered uncooked along with some meat or alternative savoury accompaniment [*laoka*]; rum was brought in bottles; guests were honoured and plied with gifts. On the last day we ate 3 rice meals in an hour, that was how great the desire to give was. This behaviour demonstrates the whole point of the 'andry-faty' festival which is for the hosts to give until there is no more to give. Fame is created by giving consumables which are immediately consumed, the evidence of wealth being destroyed in the act of eating. As a guest one is not expected to contribute anything; if one tries to give the gift is immediately, zealously, and embarrassedly returned in kind and with interest.

Giving to the hosts is not acceptable but spending money on oneself is encouraged; the idea is that the spending on the part of the hosts should encourage spending on the part of the guests. There is a sort of general loosening of the purse strings as collective communal madness takes over. It is conspicuous spending that makes the party 'masaky'; this literally means 'ripe' but conveys the idea of a rowdy party with lots of rice, meat and rum. There is a great weight of expectation on the organisers to ensure that the party is 'masaky'; they know all too well how easy it is to disappoint people. This is why it is imperative that they do not hold back. Great *panjaka* give liberally and voluntarily. The generosity of the *panjaka* does not however mean that people must be, or are necessarily, grateful. In fact, quite the opposite. No automatic respect is given to the *panjaka* because there is always the suspicion that he is holding something back. It is common therefore to hear complaints about the stinginess of the *panjaka* even from those who are fit to burst. People comment on how things are not the same as they used to be in the good old days.

The professional entertainers

In between the bouts of eating, the guests had to be entertained. To this end the organisers hired professional performers known as 'panao siry'. The 'panao siry' are a troupe of traditional ritual dancers accompanied by players of the long-drum [*hazo-lahy*]. Their act consists of drumming, dancing, clowning and acrobatics. Culturally speaking the most important component for the

audience is the playing of the long-drum. For the people of *Sahafatra* the long-drum is incredibly evocative and is specifically associated with the 'andry-faty'. An 'andry-faty' without a long-drum is regarded as a disappointment. At *Vohiljatsy* people came to hear the voice [feo] of the long-drum above all else. The woman in the troupe had a beautiful voice and played the 'kabaosy' [a small guitar like instrument] well but people were not interested to hear this type of performance which was consequently restricted to within their allocated house. What they demanded was that the troupe perform with the long-drum [hazo-lahy] two or three times each day for the duration of the festival. One explanation given for the importance of the long-drum was that the particular noise it generated alerted the ancestors to the ceremony being held in their honour. This accounts for the insistence of the people that there must be a long-drum at an 'andry-faty'; for why hold a ceremony in honour of the ancestors if they are not aware of it. It also explains the extreme happiness and excitement of the people when the drumming started; suddenly they were again close to their long-gone ancestors.

The troupe consisted of two old men who played the long-drums using one stick and one hand; a young woman who played the long-drum with two sticks; a boy of about eight who danced 'hira gasy' ¹⁵ style; three young men who were the main dancers; and another young man who sold rum and acted as the clown. All the troupe were one family, children of the two old men. The troupe performed two or three times a day following a fairly standard format. The act would open each time with a dramatic drum role. The young boy, dressed in a skirt-like wrap, would start to dance before the older ones, wearing sarongs tied Indian style, joined in. The dance was all fluttering hands, twitching torsos, stamping feet and kicking legs. Hands and arms were thrown and turned inside-out in a mixture of delicate and violent movements carried out in time to the drum beat. The women spectators were encouraged to clap along. Not long into each act the dancers would stop to demand that they were given rum to help them carry on. "Ritra ny rano!" they shouted jokingly: 'the water has run out!'. They wailed improvisations imploring someone to pay the rum-seller to fill up their bowl, refusing to continue until they were satisfied. People threw coins into the ring until the required sum was reached and then the dancing started-up again. This procedure carried on for some time until they tired of the dancing altogether. The next part of the act involved acrobatics and buffoonery. By this stage the performers were very drunk and were beginning to lose their sense of co-ordination. They would roll around in the dirt



Standing stones at dawn (top); '*panao siry*' perform at the '*andry-faty*' (bottom).

in tandem, do diving roles, stand on each others shoulders, do head stands and, much to the delight of the audience, mimic having sex. Eventually, fatigued by their own performance, they returned to the dancing routine, which by now veered between the comic and the ecstatic. After a final flourish they would stop, panting and sweating, and return to the haven and privacy of their temporary house to rest until the next act a few hours later.

The rapaciousness of the troupe

'*Panao siry*' in general have a reputation for being rapacious. When they are in a village performing they can ask for whatever they want and must be given it. If they are refused anything they will refuse to perform. Before each separate performance they must be satiated with food and drink; they do not hesitate to make people wait while they satisfy their own wants. The oldest man in the troupe we saw got easily 'breathless' [*sepotra*] but because of the greedy reputation of the '*panao siry*' everyone said he was just putting on an act to get off his work lightly. Although I do not believe the old man was putting on his illness the '*panao siry*' at *Vohiljatsy* undeniably did charge extortionate amounts for their services and were cunning bargainers. They knew that they were the only troupe in the whole region of *Vondrozo* and were therefore able to price themselves high. They also made a point of not entering into the final negotiations until they arrived at the village on the eve of the festival; that way it was very hard for the hosts to refuse their demands as it would have disappointed the public too much to see the '*panao siry*' there and then have them leave. It would also have been regarded as stinginess on the part of the sponsors and would have reflected very badly on them.

In this case the final payment agreed, after intense negotiation, was 300,000 Francs Malgaches [*enin-ali ariary*] which was equivalent to about two thin cows at the time. The '*panao siry*' demonstrated their canniness by insisting on two thin cows rather than one fat one in order to spread their investment. This was an immense payment for three days work and quite out of proportion with the rewards of any other types of labour. On top of this basic payment the '*panao siry*' received the hide of the first sacrificed cow to make a new drum with. They also received a fine cut of meat every time a cow was killed during the festival. Even so the '*panao*

siry' were shameless about talking publicly about their wages [*karama*], a subject people are normally extremely reticent about.

In a way the '*panao siry*' were meant to appear anti-social so heightening the sense of the sociality of the hosts. By extorting money from the hosts they demonstrated the hosts power and generosity. The '*panao siry*' also provided the ideal model of behaviour for the guests by forcefully parting the hosts from their wealth. Their anti-sociality was not only based on their rapacious nature but also on the way they lived. They did not live in a village but in an isolated homestead; they did not do communal ritual work [*tsy manompo*] or contribute to general collections of money [*aram-bola*]. They were self contained and socially isolated; travelling minstrels who did not invest in their own community. They lived in the territory of the *Lohanosy* clan (who are famed for their belligerence and independence) but thought of themselves as a lineage essentially outside of the clan.

As a family troupe they were self-reliant and were a law unto themselves. The skills and the drums themselves were passed down from generation to generation. Knowledge of how to make the drums was restricted to them. It was only after the younger men had served their apprenticeship as dancers that they were permitted to learn to play the drum. All this added to the exclusivity of the troupe. It was this that made them so remarkable and fascinating to the general public. It was their uniqueness that made them such a spectacle, that made people gawp at them [*sambain'olo*] in wonder, and made it such a coup to have them perform at an '*andry-faty*'. The expense and their anti-social nature were, ironically, all part of the attraction.

From the Friday morning through to Sunday afternoon the festival followed the above described pattern: food was distributed, cooked and eaten; rum was pooled and drunk while people reminisced about the dead *panjaka*; occasional boxing [*moraingy*] contests were held; and the '*panao siry*' performed two or three times a day. The hosts organised and provided while the guests consumed and looked-on. The festival was like an endurance test: by the end the hosts said that they had not slept for a week and could only survive by continuously drinking more and more rum; the *panjaka* had stayed in the long-house without a break for 3 days; and in total at least six cattle had been used up (either eaten or sold to provide funds for food/entertainment).

By the final day everyone had reached the point of total collapse; the organisers had bleary red eyes and were cat-napping sitting-up at every available opportunity; the visitors were homesick [*manimani*] and tired of being stared at in a strange place [*sambaitany*]. Everyone made a final effort to pull themselves together for the last cow sacrifice and put on their smartest clothes. As people collected their going home present of a piece of meat the atmosphere was, however, subdued. The meat was referred to as the '*lahatra*' which means 'arranged' or 'in order'. The giving of this final gift brought everything under control and allowed all the guests to head off home, nominally satisfied. As they bumped into people on the journey back they would be asked if they got a lot of meat at the festival [*nahazo hena moa?*]; the quality of the party, and the greatness of the *panjaka*, was often judged by the level of enthusiasm contained in the reply.

The purpose of funerary and commemorative practices

In this final chapter I hope I have shown both the practical and the symbolic elements of funerals and commemorations. I believe the data demonstrates that it is not just the final ends that matter, namely that bodies get put in tombs and stones get erected on hillsides, but also the process by which these ends are achieved. The funeral not only connects the *panjaka* to the earth it also serves to reiterate the inescapable difficulties involved with being a *panjaka* while reasserting the core values embodied in the role; likewise commemorations not only celebrate great men of the past but also show the importance of the living and the values they continue to live by now.

Most significantly burial and commemoration draw a key distinction between the living and the dead. The whole process of death is directed towards making people become part of the 'environment' whether it be in the form of earth in the tomb and/or standing stones spread across the landscape. What this shows is that death marks the watershed between when people are 'really people' [*olom-belo*] and when they are just part of the wider 'environment' [*Zanahary*]. Funerals and commemorations thus serve to sever and obliterate kinship links, artificially demarcating the world of the living and the dead, while incorporating the ancestors into the 'environment' in which their descendants must yet struggle to survive.

Endnotes

1. Part of the reason for this is that it is very unfortunate for a senior *panjaka* to die in the first place. As I mentioned earlier in the thesis the ideal is for a still living *panjaka* to hand on his position well before he dies.
2. This is an example of 'negative predation': denying enemies their corpses to prevent them recuperating the life essence they contain [Bloch & Parry 1982:8].
3. Fear of the consequences of the death of a senior *panjaka* probably explains why it is taboo to talk about death rituals in the Big-House/Fertile.
4. Such stories are regularly disseminated on national radio, especially with reference to the east coast of the island.
5. Minders of the One House cannot however be promoted to Earth-Shakers; this is too big a promotion to be sanctioned and would devalue the suffering endured by living Earth-Shakers.
6. Ordinary funerals are highly social events and attendance of even distant kin is often obligatory; funerals thus help to define social groups. For small clans, such as the *Masitafika*, a funeral must be attended by a representative member of every household; non-attendance is punished by a fine. Such draconian measures are impracticable for the larger clans and attendance is less strictly enforced.
7. This was the funeral of *Iaban'i Fianar*, in the village of *Miarinarivo*, clan *Vohilakatra*. He had been a senior *panjaka* for three whole 'terms' or 'cycles' during his lifetime, an achievement that was regarded as a remarkable feat; this was why he was held in particularly high esteem even though he was no longer officially in office.
8. When a senior *panjaka* dies his funeral should be attended by all the other senior *panjaka* (ie Minders of the One House and Earth-Shakers) of the clan. Each Big-House should bring tribute in the form of a ceremonial cloth [*lamba mena*]; in order to maintain secrecy these gifts must be hidden within other bags so no one can guess their purpose.
9. 20 ariary for adults [*olom-be*]; 10 ariary for young men [*kidabo*]; 4 ariary for youths [*be-minono*].
10. It is standard practice for male and female '*panabaka*' to accompany the body on its way to the tomb even in ordinary funerals; however for ordinary funerals this takes place in the day-time, not at night.
11. When a member of the community wage labouring in a distant place dies away from home it is imperative that the body eventually be transported back to the ancestral homeland. The body is normally temporarily buried wherever the death took place; it remains there until enough money is raised by relatives to pay for the transport costs back. Once there is sufficient money the bones, now known as the 'shell' [*haraka*], are disinterred and taken back to their place of origin. On arrival the 'shell' is treated like an ordinary, recently dead, body and a full funeral is held; then it, like any body, is transported by the '*panabaka*' to the tomb.
12. For opposing views of the symbolism involved in the dynamics between boys and girls during the burial process see Huntington [1988:27-46] for his interpretation of *Bara* funerals, and Bloch and Parry [1982:20-21] for their re-analysis of his work. Although both views in a sense oppose male and female fertility Huntington argues that male and female fertility are creatively combined in the burial process, whereas Bloch and Parry argue that they are actively separated out. For Huntington female and male elements must be combined in the tomb for it to be productive; for Bloch and Parry the world of biological reproduction signified by women must be banished from the patrilineally organised tomb, in order to show that it is the ancestors who are the real source of fertility, not women. The *Sahafatra* case is more in line with Bloch and Parry's interpretation than with Huntington's since men and women are strictly segregated in the patrilineally organised tomb and since only men, never women, actually ever enter the tomb to dispose of the bodies; however the strict opposition is

less elaborated than for the *Bara*, perhaps because fertility flows not only from the ancestors but also more directly from the land. Accessing fertility from the land requires, as we have seen in Chapter 7, more gender complementarity than does accessing blessing from the ancestors.

13. A son-in-law [*vinanto*] is permanently indebted to his father-in-law [*rafoza*] because he has permitted the son-in-law to take his daughter as a wife. The final act of homage the son-in-law pays is to act as a 'pall bearer' for his dead father-in-law and to sacrifice a cow on his behalf at the funeral.

14. The meat is known as the 'bad meat' because it should taste bad to any of the relatives of the deceased; the '*panabaka*', however, eat it with apparent relish.

15. A traditional type of Malagasy dancing found especially in the highlands.

Conclusion

Composite power and the ‘cult of nature’

In this thesis I have tried to show how there are two sources of authority in operation in the land of *Sahafatra*, one based on the idiom of male-descent relatedness and the other on being able to access the ‘force of nature’. In the conclusion I intend to elaborate on how these two sources of authority can be, and are, combined by the most powerful rulers in the region and how the fact that this combination is possible has major implications for how the concepts of ‘nature’ and ‘society’ (or, alternatively, ‘culture’) should be understood in the *Sahafatra* context.

The way I have structured the thesis informs certain questions. I started by wondering who the people of *Sahafatra* were and what they had in common with each other; I argued that what they shared was a particular ethos, and an outlook on the world. The clans adopted systems of authority that paralleled each other, allowing them to interact with each other, compete with each other, and compare themselves to each other. The question that remained unanswered was why it was this particular system that was adopted by all the clans. As I explored and described the system of authority it became clear that the hierarchy was based on two principles: descent and what I call a ‘culture of testing’. I tried to show that anyone ruling over people who were not their biological progeny had to prove themselves worthy of their position of elevated power by passing through a demanding ceremonial procedure. Essentially I hoped to demonstrate that in those areas of social life lacking sufficient “structure” [Wilson 1977] or “not constrained by explicit rules” [Graeber 1995:266] ‘testing’, as a means of decision-making and creating authority, proved to be a particularly attractive option

The two principles exerted different influences on different levels of the hierarchy but basically operated in an inverse relationship: Fathers whose authority was based on pure descent did not need to be tested, whereas Earth-Shakers who were selected according to anti-descent principles

had to be severely tested. The Old Woman was an anomaly, chosen as much by descent as for his qualities he still underwent extreme forms of testing.

Throughout Part I of the thesis I presented these two principles as the guiding forces for human behaviour. I gave the impression that these two principles formed a bounded realm of human 'culture' independent of the world outside. Part II was designed to show how great a misconception it would be if we accepted that impression. It aimed to show that it was impossible to separate 'nature' from 'culture' in the *Sahafatra* context since the people of *Sahafatra* were intimately involved with, and inextricably bound to, their 'environment' [*Zanahary*]. Descent only worked because umbilical cords were placed in rivers and bodies in tombs; testing only had any value because it was tied up with elemental processes and the force of the 'environment' itself. Neither descent nor testing were arbitrary, abstract systems of reckoning, they were both principles literally grounded in the land and guided by the general workings of the 'environment'.

In many societies governed by sacred kings the mundane world of descent is opposed to the royal realm which embodies anti-descent values produced through selective royal incest. For the Swazi, for example, symbolic royal incest serves to cause "the establishment of a counter-order to that of the family, an order which, by denying them, transcends the fundamental ethical principles of lineage society" [de Heusch 1981:22]. For the *Sahafatra* case I present a parallel but distinct argument, namely that although a 'counter-order' is created it is not through royal dramatisation of 'unnatural' incest but through another dehumanising process: the 'elementalisation' of royalty and their subjects.

The qualitatively different means by which royalty is made different has major implications for how 'kings' are 're-naturalised' or perhaps more appropriately 're-humanised'. In a system defined by incest, such as that of the Swazi, the extension of the king's body through 'twinning' is regarded as unnatural also and is simply seen as an extension of the complete subversion of biological rules accomplished by the special relationship entered into by the king and his mother [cf de Heusch 1982:247-55; Kuper 1952:35; Astuti 1988:606]. In a system such as that practised by the *Sahafatra* however, in which royalty is made different through 'elementalisation', the

pairing and symbolic expansion of the royal body is interpreted as a reconfirmation of the importance and power of humanity in a world which (as far as people are concerned) is threatened with being overwhelmed by the uncaring 'environment', an 'environment' [Zanahary] which Feeley-Harnik has characterised as having a "limitless capacity to inflict misfortune" [Feeley-Harnik 1991b:304].

What I hope to show in the conclusion is how, due to the particular nature of the *Sahafatra* cosmos, the 'natural' order of society and the 'counter-order' can be and are successfully recombined. I will demonstrate how it is the 'groundedness' of descent and 'testing' (the motor behind the 'counter-order') that allows these two opposing principles to be mediated and combined. The inseparability of 'nature' and 'culture' in the *Sahafatra* context thus allows composite forms of power to be created out of apparently incompatible idioms. It is the organic combination of 'nature' and 'society' (rather than their artificial separation) which allows the generation of particularly potent forms of power; consequently I argue that there is a need for any posited universalistic 'nature' - 'culture' opposition to be re-analysed more carefully.

Nature and Society

All too often the existence of separate realms of 'nature' and 'culture' have been assumed and categorically opposed to one another. However as many commentators have argued such a division just does not make sense; it certainly does not work for the *Sahafatra* case. As Geertz has pointed out [Geertz 1973a; 1973b], 'culture' was an essential part of the changing 'environment' through which man evolved. The 'culture' of proto-man was as much a part of the 'environment' as the plants, animals and physical features that went to make up his/her world. 'Culture', therefore, had as great a bearing on the evolutionary development of man and man's mind as the more tangibly obvious, readily apparent, aspects of the 'environment'. Consequently, removing 'culture' now would be equally as incapacitating as, say, removing the force of gravity. The implications of such a conclusion are important and far reaching: what it essentially means is that it is impossible to categorically separate the person and the 'environment', or, if you want, 'culture' and 'nature'.

Bateson highlights the problem in a different way to Geertz by trying to imagine drawing the boundary between a blind person with a stick and the world around him: "Where do I start? Is my mental system bounded at the handle of the stick? Is it bounded by my skin? Does it start half way up the stick? But these are nonsense questions" [Bateson 1972:459]. His example demonstrates how there is no exact location for the boundary between a person and their 'environment' in the present as well as in evolutionary time; there simply is no natural division between the two. By extension, then, it is clear that neither is there a given 'nature' - 'culture' divide. Both 'nature' and 'culture' are part of the same environmental system and any distinction made between them is arbitrary and artificial. The collapsing of 'nature' and 'culture' into each other creates a sort of 'intentional environment': "person and environment embrace an irreducible system; the person is part of the environment and, likewise, the environment is part of the person" [Descola/Palsson 1996:18]. 'Nature' and 'culture' simply become locations in a ritual drama [Simonse 1992:264].

The interest of this conclusion lies in the fact that any ethnographic study carried out must start from a theoretically holistic, rather than dualistic, position. This does not mean that no societies exist with a dualistic perspective, it merely means that when we do come across such societies we must explain how such an artificial, dualistic view is created and maintained and we must investigate whether it serves a particular purpose. The *Sahafatra* data provides a rich case study for investigating these contrasting ideas because it contains both holistic and dualistic (and pluralist) aspects, the combination of which needs to be satisfactorily analysed. I will argue that the people of *Sahafatra* are essentially holistic but that oppositions exist within their unified system which serve to test the mediatory capacities of their leaders.

A holistic world-view made-up of complex 'natures'

As I outlined in Chapter 7 the concept of '*Zanahary*' represents the general 'environment', everything in that 'environment', and the force and orientation found within all those constituent elements. '*Zanahary*' thus goes to make up the whole lived-in system. As far as the people are concerned it is a generalised, impersonal entity/force that they appeal to and a governing

orientation that is found within them. '*Zanahary*' is therefore perceived as all-pervasive; the fact that it is thought of as both internal and external to man, suggests that the people of *Sahafatra* adhere to a strictly holistic world view. The particular nature of this holistic world view is best brought out through comparison. Similar cases can be found around the world but by far the most striking data I have come across, comparable and yet in contrast to the *Sahafatra* material, relates to the Bolivian Laymi as studied by Olivia Harris.

The case of the Laymi is particularly interesting because they also appeal to a 'force of nature', Pachamama, for fertility. Pachamama, however, unlike the ungendered, unpersonified '*Zanahary*', is a gendered and personified Earth-Mother; this leads to a small but critical difference in each culture's approach to the 'environment'. As an Earth-Mother Pachamama is in a sense in competition with human beings and therefore only has a certain degree of fertility to give. Consequently the Laymi, in stark contrast to the people of *Sahafatra*, must maintain a balance between human fertility and natural fertility. As Harris says: "In Laymi culture land is paramount; humans must serve the land both directly by cultivating it and through worship of the telluric spirits. The dead too direct their energies towards agriculture and animal husbandry. Large families are frowned on by the Laymi because they upset the balance between humans and land. When ritual libations are poured to celebrate natural increase, human fertility is never singled out as a primary value. Rather it is metaphorically transposed into the key of vegetation: the most common symbol of fertility is that of flowers" [Harris 1982:48].

'*Zanahary*' on the other hand, as an all encompassing force, is thought of as an inexhaustible resource which humans can exploit without fear of over-appropriation leading to sterility¹; this is why the people of *Sahafatra* value large families and try to have as many children as possible. Unlike the Laymi, who represent the reproduction of their society "through the land and its fertility, rather than human fertility"² [Harris 1982:65], the people of *Sahafatra* are dedicated to human fertility and explicitly promote it without fear of upsetting the cosmic balance. The reason for this radical difference in outlook is subtle but deep rooted: whereas the *Sahafatra* dead are literally transformed into another element of '*Zanahary*', the very 'environment' which their descendants live in and exploit, the Laymi dead remain slightly marginalised and, while not really existing in the world of the living, are not truly incorporated into the Pachamama either;

rather they remain outside the Pachamama and are simply marshalled to help make the land fertile at certain times of year. The Laymi spirits of the dead cannot be banished from the world of the living until the crops have been brought in and the season's agricultural work is over because it is they that make the land fertile; "the deceased are [thus] embraced within the agricultural cycle" [Harris 1982:59]. Even dead Laymi children are "harnessed to the needs of the agricultural economy" [Harris 1982:64]; their job is to maintain the irrigation ditches while God whips them and their tears fall as rain. The division between, and conceptual separation of, Laymi people and the Pachamama shows how the Laymi live in a more dualistic world than the people of *Sahafatra*; it is this dualism that leads to competition between human and supra-human forces, and which creates a sort of contract between people and the earth.

The relationship between the Laymi people and the land is made apparent by the similarity between their symbolic opening up of the land, the actual act of ploughing the land, and the burial process. Normally pairs of bulls are yoked up to plough the land, however at the start of the season, in order to celebrate the Pachamama, pairs of young men are yoked up to the plough instead and driven across the fields to open up the first furrow: "they are bulls, and like bulls they are strong and uncontrollable. The wilder they are, the harder they run, the more efficacious is the ritual, the more glorious their show of strength. Not only their strength, but also their paired duality under the plough makes of bulls a primary expression of the integral bond between humans and earth" [Harris 1982:52]. This agricultural idiom is extended to include the dead: the "team that transports the corpse to its resting place in the fields is known as the 'yunta', the same term used for the yoke of the bulls who open up the earth for sowing.....The way that the corpse is taken to be placed in the newly-opened earth is thus explicitly reminiscent of a ritual which embodies the critical act of cultivation" [Harris 1982:52].

This account of how the Laymi parallel the disposal of their dead with the 'critical act of cultivation', which is curiously and deeply reminiscent of how the *Sahafatra* recreate their own critical act of cultivation in the rice paddy, actually precisely goes to show how different the Laymi are to the people of *Sahafatra*. It is Laymi commitment to the land alone, as opposed to *Sahafatra* commitment to the 'environment' and its workings as a whole, that differentiates between the societies. The essentially radically different outlooks displayed by these two

apparently very similar (on the surface) cultures nicely captures the crucial distinction between a simple earth-cult, as practised by the Laymi, and the more holistic ‘cult of nature’ as practised by the people of *Sahafatra*.

Even though the people of *Sahafatra* may believe that they live in a more holistic and seamless world than that inhabited by the Laymi this does not mean that they think the world they live in is simple and one-dimensional. Just because they do not posit a definite ‘nature’ - ‘culture’ divide [cf Thomas 1996:29 for a similar view on the *Temambondro* of southeast Madagascar] (I cannot even imagine them trying to draw such a distinction) does not mean the world has to be uniform. To the contrary their world, the ‘environment’ [*Zanahary*], is divided up into sets of things that display different types of ‘nature’. People are different to animals which are different to plants which are different to elements; water is different to earth which is different to wood which is different to stone; all of which are different to the ‘nature’ of the whole thing, the all-encompassing, unknowable ‘*Zanahary*’ system.

Although the world is broken down into a complex system of sets each having its own roughly definable ‘nature’, these are not regarded as hard-and-fast categories. The sets are simply heuristic devices designed to make it easier to navigate through the dangerous ‘environment’; they do not represent discrete categories that have nothing in common with each other. For example, people are said to be very different to animals, and yet cows are considered to be very similar to humans; rice is part of the family of things that grow [*zava-mitsiry*] but which do not have a conscious orientation [*fanahy*], and yet rice, like people who do have a conscious orientation [*fanahy*], gets pregnant and gives birth.

The world does not consist of a monolithic ‘nature’ upon which human society is superimposed, rather it is made up of lots of different ‘natures’ interacting with one another in what could be described as a massive ‘natural’ system. The myriad ‘natures’ have been approximately arranged in sets by people, who nevertheless recognise that these sets are not consistent and discrete, but open and overlapping. The consequence of this is that sets can be manipulated, ‘natures’ can be mixed, and non-human forces can be harnessed. The men who can effectively master many ‘natures’, thereby accessing life-giving non-human forces, are the ones who rise to power.

Dualistic tendencies: dual sources of fertility and authority

If the people of *Sahafatra* are living in a world they perceive as holistic, then it is necessary for me to justify my argument that authority stems from two alternative sources, which gives the impression of a dualistic world. If the 'environment' is such a unified system how can this be an accurate representation of what is actually going on? The simple answer is that the people of *Sahafatra* do not live in a dualistic world, rather they sometimes look at their holistic world from a dualistic perspective. The world is not divided in two but the '*Zanahary*' system through which they perceive it is thought to stretch between two contrasting poles of interest: one personal, specific and human and the other impersonal, generalised and non-human.

There is a dualism between humans and non-humans because, from a human perspective, there is, unsurprisingly, more concern for human affairs. However this dualism is not a categorical opposition, but a secondary idiom transposed onto a holistic world. As I have pointed out throughout the text, authority rests on the ability to guarantee human well-being; this can only be achieved by being able to access and channel fertility wherever it may come from. Power relies precisely on the ability to access both human and non-human fertility for the benefit of ones subjects. Thus the human and non-human worlds are necessarily linked. The dualistic tendency represents a self-interested subjective, perspective that differentiates between the end and the means: the means involves manipulating the whole 'environment', whereas the end is to further just the human part of that world. People prioritise themselves but still recognise that they are implicated in, and affected by, the whole system.

Throughout the thesis I have concentrated on bringing out the dual sources of fertility in operation. I have contrasted the fertility stemming from proper descent relations and the fertility stemming from the wider 'environment'. I have distinguished these for theoretical purposes; what we must remember, though, is that it is the combination of the two that is really efficacious, and therefore it is the combination of the two that the people are really concerned with. There is no clearer way of emphasising this than by discussing the transformation of ancestors into undifferentiated '*Zanahary*'. Compared to other parts of Madagascar the cult of the ancestors is weakly expressed in the land of *Sahafatra*; ancestral genealogies are particularly shallow and

quickly forgotten and the ancestors themselves (as individuals) are rarely called upon. As the data on the burial of *panjaka* should have made apparent however, this does not mean that what happens to ancestors is unimportant.

What happens when ancestors die is critical; however, instead of being revered as individuals they are depersonalised so that they may be more effectively fused with the earth/land. As more and more ancestors are buried in the tombs there is an ever increasing connection between the ancestors and the 'environment'. The obliteration of personal identities is essential for this connection; one could say that the ancestors are '*zanaharied*' (ie transformed into a part of the 'environment') earlier and more forcefully than in other parts of the island. The dual sources of fertility, human descent and the wider 'environment', are not really separate; they are actually part of the same system and interplay with each other as two elements in a holistic model. Burial practices serve to bring the two together: dead people literally go to make up the land which in turn becomes more accessible and compliant to living people.

Although the most explicit and incontrovertible connection between people and the land is made in death, links are also made in life. The key role of living senior *panjaka* is to mediate between people and the 'environment', or more accurately to mediate between one pole of the 'environment' and the other. However, in order to do this he needs the help of his subjects who must act in conjunction with him to make him a potent force.

The first tier of authority: mastery of human affairs

The first tier of authority therefore concerns the mastery of human affairs since the senior *panjaka* can only be strong through the connection he has with his subjects. He tries to control them by playing on, and attempting to validate in his subjects' eyes, various idioms that justify his power: the idiom of fatherhood in which he is the 'Father' and his subjects the children; the idiom of the body in which he is the 'Head' and his subjects the body; the idiom of womanhood through which he associates himself with and encompasses the fertility of women; the idiom of the centre in which he is the immovable and silent 'Centre' that all the subjects must approach;

and the idiom of the elements in which he is the life-giving 'Earth' and his subjects the vitalising 'Water'.

The more senior the *panjaka*, the more idioms he must be able to express himself in, the more schema he must be able to instantiate [cf Errington 1989:285 on the creation of potency through performance]. This is no simple matter, however, because, as becomes clear when we examine all the idioms of power together, the source of power actually lies outside the senior *panjaka*. Admittedly the senior *panjaka* has his own intrinsic strength, the strength of an ordinary vigorous man; this is after all why he is 'chosen', but all his superhuman powers are derived from the people. As an honorary 'Father' he is dependent on his subjects acceptance of the role of children; as a man he can only be associated with women and relies on being able to appropriate their power of fertility; as a 'Head' he is nothing unless he is constituted by a body; as a 'Centre' [cf Geertz 1980; Errington 1989] he relies on his subjects approaching him; as the 'Earth' he needs the presence of 'Water' to release his power.

It is apparent then that all the strengths of the senior *panjaka* are also his potential weaknesses. He has potentially superhuman force but he is always reliant on the support of his subjects to realise that power. As I have shown in the thesis, the only way for the senior *panjaka* to combat his weakness is to impress his subjects by continually passing pragmatic tests, thereby earning their loyalty and cooperation. It is not enough, however, for a senior *panjaka* to be master of human affairs alone; he can only really affirm his position by controlling aspects of the non-human world in addition. Until he does so his authority remains external, like clothing, rather than intrinsic; he may rule but his authority is like a mantle or a weight that must be worn or carried [*indasina*], rather than an inherent quality.

Conveniently the self-same tests that gain him support allow him to temporarily control and position his subjects in such a way that their joint arrangement recreates life-giving elemental reactions. This generates what I call the 'secondary blessing' which is so valued by the people. This, then, is how a senior *panjaka* manages to consolidate his position: he passes tests of his quality and in the process promotes general fertility. The idioms of control become more real, the support of his subjects becomes more automatic and unquestioned, and his power becomes

less of a mantle and more a part of his person. There is a change from power as relationship to power as an embodied quality [cf Errington 1989:47]. Even so the transition is never complete; a senior *panjaka* can always be removed and have his power taken away from him. Nevertheless it is undeniable that successful and longstanding senior *panjaka* do wield more 'inherent' power than their junior and more recently 'elected' counterparts. As McKinnon says for the Tanimbar islanders: "the highest nobility represents ... the value of an achieved permanence in an otherwise mobile world" [McKinnon 1991:275].

The nature of ruling: a synthesis of two different types of authority

It is the quest for inherent power that helps define the nature of 'ruling'. To become a permanent fixture involves being more than just a man, it involves combining human and non-human elements. This is best brought out by examining the conceptual relationship between the leaders representing the extreme poles of the authority system: Fathers at the bottom (championing ordered descent relations) and Earth-Shakers at the top (championing wild elemental processes). The gulf between the Father and the Earth-Shaker is a wide one. A Father simply rules whereas an Earth-Shaker is chosen to rule and can be removed if he proves unsatisfactory. A Father rules by automatic right; an Earth-Shaker rules by passing certain tests of his quality³. A Father rules in the straightforward sense of the word '*manjaka*' - to rule; an Earth-Shaker follows its deeper root meaning, he endures hardship (sacrificing cattle for fertility) that his people may endure.

In spite of the strong opposition between the roles of Father and Earth-Shaker, the Earth-Shaker manages to symbolically combine the two. The fact that the Earth-Shaker also becomes known as the 'Father of the People' is the most critical of all combinations. By achieving this dual status he manages to encompass the whole authority system bringing together the two contrasting idioms of descent relatedness and the 'force of the environment', mediating them in one person. Once he is elected a process of naturalisation begins which day by day makes it harder for him to be removed. He is not only naturalised in the sense of becoming a 'Father' to those who are not really his children; he is also more and more concretely associated with the land and, more particularly, the elemental 'Earth' in which everything is grounded and around which the

alchemical processes that bring life revolve. As embodiments of the whole system the senior *panjaka* become roots, sources of stability and life, linking human and non-human fertility.

The confusion between the two archetypes, Father and Earth-Shaker, is key to the people's understanding of authority in *Sahafatra*. Confusion is the appropriate word here, for although the *Sahafatra* authority system follows certain, in a sense logical, principles, there is no master-builder and no-one who has an overall view of the whole. It cannot be rationalised, it is not in its nature to be rationalised. The power of it lies in a set of combinations and contrasts. In the difference and forced combination between the Father and the Earth-Shaker lies the creation of a particularly potent type of power. Ultimate authority is created from a marriage and mutation of two models: the model of transactions within the family and the model of growth in the wider 'environment'. What we have is in part a warping and exaggeration of normal family relations and in part a mimesis of the important perceived processes of the natural world.

Comparing the *Zafimaniry* and the *Sahafatra*

To bring out the particularities of the *Sahafatra* case I will compare the people of *Sahafatra* to another Malagasy group, the *Zafimaniry* [cf Bloch 1992b; 1993b; 1995a; 1995b], who inhabit a band of high altitude montane forest several hundred kilometres to the north. I use the *Zafimaniry* as a sounding-board because they share a comparable conception of 'Zanahary' [cf Bloch 1995a:67] to the people of *Sahafatra*; the fact that they have a similar outlook on the 'environment' but nevertheless lead distinctive lifestyles makes for a very illuminating comparison.

The *Zafimaniry*, like the people of *Sahafatra*, want to make their mark on the uncaring 'environment', 'Zanahary'. They do this in two ways: by building hard, wooden 'holy houses' as enduring symbols of the fertility and complementarity of two spouses; and by raising megalithic monuments, eternal but 'dead' and impersonal commemorations of past lives [cf Bloch 1995a:67-75]. The *Sahafatra* also want to make their mark on an equally uncaring 'environment', however, as we have seen, they do this by more directly harnessing the 'force of

nature' [*Zanahary*] when *panjaka* are 'raised-up'. The activities of both peoples demonstrate that to make ones mark on the 'environment' one has also to challenge it in some way. The examples I have given above are symbolic challenges; direct challenges are expressed in different ways and give us some clue as to the overriding concerns of each people. The *Zafimaniry* express their direct challenge by cutting down what they perceive as the cold, hostile and inhospitable forest, which is, for them, the quintessential manifestation of 'Zanahary' [cf Bloch 1995a]. Overwhelmed and encircled by 'Zanahary' they try and make space to live and prosper through clearance; they try to create good, open views and thus value 'clarity'.

The people of *Sahafatra* find themselves in a contrasting situation and react accordingly; they find themselves in an empty, unconstructed world, a bare landscape onto which they have to graft themselves. Consequently they want to make things grow up and fill the landscape; they are obsessed with the planting of trees and the creation of paddies, villages and monuments. They strike out into the wilderness in order to build up something new, defying 'Zanahary' which is associated with the empty landscape. In a sense, then, the *Sahafatra* are filling up the 'environment' in contrast to the *Zafimaniry* who are carving a place out of it. This explains why the *Zafimaniry* are devotees of the 'cult of the house' [cf Bloch 1992b; 1993b; 1995a], directing their energies to making their houses permanent using hardwoods gleaned from the forest, while the people of *Sahafatra* follow what I call the 'cult of nature', mimicking dynamic natural reactions that are perceived to be generative and life-giving.

If we examine the contrasting sets of relations with the 'environment' we can see how the two different strategies, or 'cults', are opposed. In a sense the *Zafimaniry* domesticate the forest (the primary manifestation of 'Zanahary') by turning it into houses to be inhabited by people; they make their lives and achievements parallel the natural world, as they perceive it, by associating people with their growing and hardening houses. However they do more than this in that they anthropomorphize the house whose central post comes to represent the founding father and whose hearth the founding mother [cf Bloch 1992b:142; 1995b]. The production of the house through human labour thus casts 'Zanahary' in human terms and allows the *Zafimaniry* to beg blessing from 'Zanahary' in semi-human form [cf Bloch 1995b].

The anthropomorphisation of '*Zanahary*' is not quite as straightforward as it seems, however, and is subject to a critical temporal condition: the interpretation of events presented above is only true from the perspective of the living. Once people die they are incorporated within the house and it could equally be said that they have been transformed into '*Zanahary*' rather than the other way round. People are thus turned into places [cf Bloch 1995a] as much as places are turned into people, each person getting closer to and even becoming part of the natural 'environment' as they get older and die. After death people continue their transformation into objects of wood ('holy houses' symbolising long-dead productive couples) and stone (specially erected monuments in the forest symbolising sibling groups). The dead are essentially 'elementalised', in a way the living never can be, and they come to approximate 'nature'.

This is where the critical difference lies: the *Zafimaniry* are only turned into elements of 'nature' when they are dead; the people of *Sahafatra*, on the other hand, are 'elementalised' while they are still living. As has been demonstrated in the re-analysis of the 'raising-up' of the *panjaka* (Chapter 7), the people of *Sahafatra* become earth and water during the ceremony [cf Feeley-Harnik 1991b:303-400 for comparable transformations]. Not only do they represent elements while still alive, however, they also constitute the most productive and dynamic elements (earth and water) as opposed to the more static elements of wood and stone favoured by the *Zafimaniry*.

The *Zafimaniry* case in which elements (from the point of view of the living) are anthropomorphised is completely the reverse process to what is occurring in the land of *Sahafatra* where humans are turning themselves into elements. In the land of *Sahafatra* people mimic the natural processes, manipulating the 'force of nature'; they more directly challenge the idea of '*Zanahary*'s 'unknowability' and its impossible distance from human affairs in order to harness fertility. By so doing they bend the 'force of nature' and challenge the natural order in a way that the *Zafimaniry*, as refugees in the forest who are, politically speaking, 'running away from power', do not attempt. The dangers involved in such a strategy of human alchemy, and the willingness to face up to them, are indicative of a key cultural difference between the *Zafimaniry* and the people of *Sahafatra*. It is the political ambitiousness of the people of *Sahafatra* that makes it in their interest to direct their energies towards the control and appropriation of the 'force of nature' while accepting the corollary risks; for the *Zafimairy* who

are, in contrast, politically unambitious and who are more concerned with survival and maintenance than territorial expansion, such risks are simply not worth taking.

The perils inherent in the process of the attempted appropriation of 'nature' explain precisely why it is that *Sahafatra* leaders must be strong and why it is that they have to be tested; tests do not just prove a leader's worth in pragmatic human terms, they also make sure that a leader is up to the sterner challenge of combining human and non-human fertility in an elemental way. The people of *Sahafatra* seem to have come to the conclusion that the only way to deal with such an amoral force as '*Zanahary*' is to test and challenge it. Human beings may be dwarfed by the immense power of '*Zanahary*' but this does not mean that they cannot tap into it, especially if they work co-operatively as they so obviously do in the 'raising-up' of the *panjaka*. The people of *Sahafatra* deal with the challenge they face in several ways: they select someone strong to lead them and test him to ensure he is; they help make him strong by in a sense constituting him (women contribute their fertility, subjects and descendants go to make up the body of a giant etc); they work cooperatively towards a common aim; and they willingly 'sacrifice' their leader (in the sense of sacrificing his wealth and well-being) to the cause.

Houses, tombs and standing stones

What is interesting about the contrasting systems of the *Sahafatra* and the *Zafimaniry*, the one combative and the other accommodating, is that they both revolve around houses. The houses are however put to very different uses. For the *Zafimaniry* enduring, stable houses are a straightforward sign of gender complementarity and fertility [cf Bloch 1993b; 1995a: 67-71]; for the people of *Sahafatra*, on the other hand, the house is a complex structure that mediates the relationship between the human and non-human world, between the patrilineally organised family and the wider landscape. Thus, whereas the development of the *Zafimaniry* house represents a one-directional process of growth the *Sahafatra* house represents the perpetual mediation between two different sets of relations: the ordered relations of patrilineal descent and the wild undifferentiated relations associated with elemental reactions. What the house means to the *Zafimaniry* is thus 'clear' [cf Bloch 1995a:65-67] in comparison to the *Sahafatra* who have

to endlessly keep on working it out.

This endless working out is reminiscent of the *Merina* monarch's repeated resolution of the contradiction between the lifeless ancestral order and the wild fertility of the vanquished autochthons, the *Vazimba*, who personify the natural power of the land. The *Merina* king would bathe in water, which symbolised the *Vazimba*, thus overcoming the eternal opposition and demonstrating his dominance; however, the moment he stepped out of the bath the original contradiction was recreated necessitating the regular repetition of the ritual [Bloch 1987b:297].

Tombs also have different meanings for the two peoples. For the *Zafimaniry* tombs (and standing stones) are unproductive as they recreate sibling groups which stand in opposition to fertile marriages and thus symbolize broken houses [cf Bloch 1995a:72-74]. Tombs for the *Sahafatra* also regroup siblings, symbolising patrilineal relations made concrete; however the process of burial is productive because the ancestors are viewed as literally becoming a part of the land, inseparable and indistinguishable from it. The way the bodies of important men have to be treated to ensure safe entry into the tomb underlines the importance of this connection made between people and the land. Ironically, although the two groups have radically opposed ideas of the productiveness of the tomb both are equally afraid of it: the *Zafimaniry* avoid the tomb because of the frightening unnatural and unproductive relations it enshrines; the *Sahafatra* avoid the tomb because the humans that entered it have turned into terrifying 'wild animals' returning to become part of the amoral, inhuman 'environment'.

The attitude of both peoples to the standing stones they erect also illustrates their different perspectives on the 'environment' and on how to deal with it. When *Zafimaniry* standing stones are put up they are not placed in prominent positions; consequently they quickly become part of the forest and are often mistaken for naturally occurring rocks, which they become interchangeable with [cf Bloch 1995a:74]. *Sahafatra* standing stones, to the contrary, are purposefully placed on the top of bare hills precisely so that they may be highly visible and can be seen from far off. As I described in Chapter 8 the way they are erected is designed as a test; the passing of the test ensures that the stones become permanent features of the landscape and that they are not subsumed by it. The stones thus represent a challenge to the 'environment' and

to living people to live up to the great feats of the past. So although both *Zafimaniry* standing stones and *Sahafatra* standing stones are regarded as 'dead' and unproductive (because they represent infertile sibling groups and dead chieftains respectively), in practise they serve different symbolic purposes. One (the *Zafimaniry* way) is the acceptance of the way the 'environment' is, the other (the *Sahafatra* way) is a challenge to its dominance.

In a way the difference between the two perspectives can be accounted for by a slightly different view of what 'Zanahary' is. For the *Zafimaniry*, 'Zanahary' is more externalised than for the *Sahafatra* who are deeply integrated and involved with it. The people of *Sahafatra* and 'Zanahary' are literally wrapped up in each other, challenging each other and incorporating each other. The *Zafimaniry* challenge the 'environment' in a practical sense (cutting down the forest) but otherwise they run their lives parallel to it. For this reason 'environment' (as something external) [cf Cooper 1992⁴] may be the best word to translate 'Zanahary' from the point of view of the *Zafimaniry*; for the *Sahafatra*, who are more dialectically involved, 'force of nature' is probably a better translation. The *Sahafatra* are playing with the 'force of nature' all through their lives, ritually as well as practically. The *Zafimaniry* are concerned with the fertility of people (pairs of spouses) and objectify this fertility in the idiom of nature by building 'holy houses' from the 'environment' and into the 'environment'. The *Zafimaniry* mimic the 'environment', imitating it in human terms, but they do not reproduce the life giving alchemical elemental reactions found within that 'environment'. They are therefore less actively involved with it than the people of *Sahafatra*.

This explains the difference in the structure and nature of authority between the *Zafimaniry* and the *Sahafatra*. The *Zafimaniry* have a relatively egalitarian society; they have elders but these are only really sanctified long after they are dead subject to the condition that their house endures [cf Bloch 1995a; 1995b]. There is no room for hierarchy in this system because authority can only be proven by human fertility, and human fertility cannot be sufficiently expressed to impress in one lifetime. The *Sahafatra* provide a contrary case; their active involvement with, and proximity to, 'nature' creates a system ideal for hierarchy and divine kingship; leaders are people who can come into contact with divinity during their lifetime, access and channel fertility from it, and yet survive. The possibility of harnessing non-human fertility through testing thus

produces a strong sense of hierarchy if a necessarily fluid one.

The 'culture of testing' championed by the *Sahafatra* also contains an important external political dimension as it expresses a confidence and a desire for growth and expansion that is alien to the fugitive, safety-oriented *Zafimaniry* [cf Bloch 1995b]. Adherence to a 'culture of testing' in general entails a confidence that sets the *Sahafatra* apart from other Malagasy peoples who have suffered a loss of confidence; most notable amongst these are the *Sakalava* who, bullied and subjugated by the French colonial forces, adopted a strategy of secrecy, hiding and protecting the true source of their power by projecting it into the realm of death, turning royal tombs and relics into shrines and places of ritual work where it was harder for the French to interfere [Feeley-Harnik 1984; 1991b].

The opposite extreme (an excess of confidence), but possibly the closest equivalent to contemporary *Sahafatra* exuberance anyway, is to be found in the historical past during the conquest period of the *Merina* empire; at this time state rituals such as that of the royal bath not only helped effect power (as the 'raising-up' of *panjaka* does now) but also actually demonstrated supreme domination [Bloch 1987b]. The *Merina* state symbolism of the past was therefore, despite having much in common with present-day *Sahafatra* ritual, at least a stage beyond the current situation in *Sahafatra* because of the triumphalistic overtones it contained.

Divine leaders

In a way we have now come full circle. To begin with I argued that all worlds must be holistic but that they may then be divided up in any number of ways. I then outlined how even though the *Sahafatra* perceive their world as holistic they make an artificial distinction in order to separate human and non-human fertility. And now, finally, I have argued that this dualistic division has been transcended and mediated by Earth-Shakers who recreate the original holistic world [for similar ideas of re-composition cf McKinnon 1991:277-283⁵].

The ability to transcend the apparent paradox, re-unifying what has been felt to be sundered,

lends Earth-Shakers a divine quality, something which has already been hinted at by commentators on Madagascar. Talking of the *Tanala* of *Ikongo* Philippe Beaujard describes the power of a senior *panjaka*:

"Ce pouvoir createur du mpanjaka derive de sa nature divine de <olo masy>; il parait lie a une conception cosmique de la personne <royale> et du sacrifice ou le Souverain Supreme offre son etre pour la Creation. A travers la mort rituelle du sacrifiant, tout sacrifice tend a reproduire ce sacrifice originel, le <roi> representant le Demiurge" [Beaujard 1983a:312].

The *Sahafatra* case where it is not the individual that is important (after all Earth-Shakers can be disposed of when they are 'used up') but the role he plays makes it even more tempting to think of Earth-Shakers as divine kings. As Evans-Pritchard has said with reference to the divine kingship of the Shilluk: "A king symbolizes a whole society and must not be identified with any part of it. He must be in the society and yet stand outside it and this is only possible if his office is raised to a mystical plane. It is the kingship and not the king who is divine" [Evans-Pritchard 1948:36].

This is very much the case in the land of *Sahafatra* although it is not so much the office that is divine so much as the 'environment' itself. However the principle is the same: individual Earth-Shakers are expendable but the role Earth-Shakers play is not. This set up allows for and even encourages political rivalries and metaphorical regicide (ie the removal of 'tired' *panjaka*) since it is only the office not the person that is sacred [cf Adler 1982:181]. As long as there is someone efficacious to practice the Cult of '*Zanahary*' ('cult of nature'), bringing together humans and the wider 'environment', that is all that matters. It is the Cult of '*Zanahary*', as expressed through senior *panjaka* possessed by the 'force of nature', that holds the disparate clans together. There is a double configuration in operation: political divisions between clans on the one hand but ritual unity expressed through parallel political systems and a common attitude to 'nature' and the 'environment' on the other.

It is interesting to review the Swazi royal rituals in the light of these conclusions. In the scenario

of the Swazi 'ncwala' the king is cast as both a 'sacred monster' (this is why he is so powerful) and as a 'child of the people' (this is why he is beholden to his subjects): kinship is thus both emphatically denied and emphatically affirmed at different sequential moments. Kinship could be said to be superseded in the ritual [de Heusch 1981] but not in the daily practice of running the state; after all, after the event kinship is also always returned to as a critical idiom for structuring everyday life. What is telling however is how kinship is transformed in the process; the ritual, precisely through denying kinship, creates the potential for new symbolic kinship links to be formed between the king and his subjects, allowing for the incorporation of previously unrelated clans into the state, which is still, ironically, conceptualised as "the family writ large" [Kuper 1947:115-116]. The ritual serves not only to separate the king "so that he may take on certain supernatural attributes which provide him with power" [Beidelman 1966:394] but also to transform the idiom of kinship which after the event can be applied in more inclusive, extensive, imaginative and politically unifying ways. The ritual therefore not only accesses supernatural power, it also creates new areas of 'relatedness'. I would argue that this is what is also happening in the *Sahafatra* case: the human cooperation involved in marshalling beneficial 'elemental forces' leads to a reassessment of kinship relations; mere agglomerations of people emerge from the royal rituals more related to each other than they were at the outset as a result of their joint life-giving achievements. The royal rituals of the *Sahafatra* are therefore transformative as well as generative.

This then brings us back to the very first unanswered question: why did all the clans adopt this particular system of authority? But now we have an answer. This particular system of authority is ideal because it accommodates and interlinks all the key areas of concern to the people of *Sahafatra*: a concern with maintaining the family and generating many descendants, a concern with keeping hold of ancestral land and utilising its fertility to the full, a concern with competing with each other to prove worth and maintain power, and a concern with creating 'relatedness' in a land where everyone was once a stranger to everyone else.

These concerns are not only all satisfied by the shared political system, they are also made relevant to each other by it. The lives and activities of Earth-Shakers reconcile an artificially divided world. By transcending the perceived difference between descent and the 'environment'

(through overcoming a titanic struggle with their demanding subjects) the Earth-Shakers reconstitute a 'natural' world where all things (and people) are related to each other, and where all types of fertility can be channelled for the general good of the people. The question of whether *Sahafatra* is a land or a people, which seemed so trivial at the beginning, returns to haunt us now at the end; but now we have an answer, for *Sahafatra* is neither one nor the other, but the combination of the two.

Endnotes

1. The people of *Sahafatra* do not see 'Zanahary' as a limited good; rather they are simply concerned, like the hunter-gatherers described by Woodburn [Woodburn 1982], with 'appropriating nature'.
2. This is why in Laymi culture pregnant women must be kept away from spirits [Harris 1982].
3. He must be a "man of prowess" [cf Atkinson 1989:10].
4. "Etymologically, the concept of the 'environment' refers to that which surrounds and, therefore, strictly speaking, an environment incorporates just about everything, except that which is surrounded" [Cooper 1992].
5. "Yet life, growth, and productivity are made possible not only by the processes of differentiation and separation that extend life out from the source, but also by the processes of re-composition and encompassment that ground the source of life" [McKinnon 1991:277].

Bibliography

- Abinal, F.G., and V.Malzac. 1987 [1888]. *Dictionnaire Malgache Francais*. Fianarantsoa.
- Adams, Richard and Folgelson, Raymond. 1977. *The anthropology of power*. Academic Press: New York.
- Adler, A. 1982. The Ritual Doubling of the Person of the King. In M. Izard and P. Smith, eds. *Between Belief and Transgression: structuralist essays in religion, history and myth*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Allen, Philip M. 1995. *Madagascar: conflicts of authority in the great island*. Boulder: Westview Press
- Althabe, Gerard. 1969. *Oppression et liberation dans l'imaginaire: les communautes villageoises de la cote orientale de Madagascar*. Paris: Maspero.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1990. *Language and power: exploring political cultures in Indonesia*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Anonymous. 1957. La province de Fianarantsoa: la region sud-est; districts de Farafangana, Vaingaindrano, Midongy-du-sud. *Revue de Madagascar* 131:335-349.
- Astuti, Rita. 1988. Ritual, history and the Swazi Ncwala: Sacred Kingship and the origin of the State. *Africa* XLIII, no.4: 603-620
- _____. 1993. Food for pregnancy: procreation, marriage and images of gender among the Vezo of western Madagascar. *Social Anthropology* 1:277-290.
- _____. 1995a. *People of the Sea: Identity and Descent among the Vezo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1995b. "The Vezo are not a kind of people": identity, difference, and "ethnicity" among a fishing people of western Madagascar. *American Ethnologist* 22:464-482.
- Atkinson, Jane. 1989. *The art and politics of Wana shamanship*. Oxford: University of California Press
- Bare, Jean Francois. 1977. *Pouvoirs des vivants, Langage des Morts: Ideo-Logiques Sakalava*. Paris: Maspero.
- _____. 1986. L'organisation sociale sakalava du Nord: une recapitulation. In C. Kottak, J-A. Rakotoarisoa, A. Southall, and P. Verin, eds. *Madagascar: Society and History*. Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Bateson, G. 1972. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. Frogmore: Paladin.
- Beaujard, Philippe. 1983a. Les conceptions symboliques de la royauté et l'exercice de pouvoir dans les royaumes tanala de l'ikongo (XVIIe et XIXe siecles). In F. Raison-Jourde, ed. *Les Souverains de Madagascar*. Paris: Karthala.
- _____. 1983b. *Princes et Paysans: les Tanala de l'ikongo*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Beidelman, T. O. 1966. Swazi Royal Ritual. *Africa* XXXVI: 373-405.
- _____. 1986. *Moral Imagination in Kaguru Modes of Thought*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Belrose-Huyghes, Vincent. 1983. Structure et symbolique de l'espace en Imerina. In F. Raison-Jourde, ed. *Les Souverains de Madagascar*. Paris: Karthala.

- Bloch, Maurice. 1971. *Placing the Dead: Tombs, Ancestral Villages, and Kinship Organisation in Madagascar*. London: Seminar Press
- _____. 1974. Symbols, song, dance and features of articulation: is religion an extreme form of traditional authority? *European Journal of Sociology* 15:55-81.
- _____. 1978. Marriage amongst equals: an analysis of the marriage ceremony of the Merina of Madagascar. *Man* 13:21-33.
- _____. 1981a. Hierarchy and equality in Merina kinship. *Ethnos* 46:5-18.
- _____. 1981b. Tombs and states. In S. C. Humphreys and H. King, eds. *Mortality and Immortality*. London: Academic Press.
- _____. 1982. Death, women and power. In M. Bloch and J. Parry, eds. *Death and the regeneration of life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1985. Almost eating the ancestors. *Man* 20:631-46.
- _____. 1986. *From blessing to violence: history and ideology in the circumcision ritual of the Merina of Madagascar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1987a. Descent and sources of contradiction in representations of women and kinship. In J. F. Collier and S. J. Yanagisako, eds. *Gender and Kinship*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.
- _____. 1987b. The ritual of the royal bath in Madagascar: the dissolution of death, birth and fertility into authority. In *Rituals of Royalty*, ed. D. Cannadine and S. Price. Cambridge.
- _____. 1989. The symbolism of money in Imerina. In M. Bloch and J. Parry, eds. *Money and the morality of exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1991. Language, anthropology and cognitive science. *Man* 26:183-198.
- _____. 1992a. *Prey into Hunter: the politics of religious experience*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1992b. What goes without saying: the conceptualisation of Zafimaniry society. In A. Kuper, ed. *Conceptualizing Society*. London: Routledge.
- _____. 1993a. Domain specificity, living kinds, and symbolism. In P. Boyer, ed. *Cognitive Aspects of Religious Symbolism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1993b. Zafimaniry birth and kinship theory. *Social Anthropology* 1(1b):119-132.
- _____. 1995a. People into places: Zafimaniry concepts of clarity. In E. Hirsch and M. O'Hanlon, eds. *The Anthropology of Landscape*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- _____. 1995b. The resurrection of the house among the Zafimaniry of Madagascar. In J. Carsten and S. Hugh-Jones, eds. *About the House: Levi-Strauss and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bloch, Maurice and Jonathan Parry, eds. 1982. Introduction. *Death and the regeneration of life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1979. The Kabyle house or the world reversed. In P. Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, Mervyn. 1978. *Madagascar Rediscovered*. London: Damien Tunnacliffe.
- Carsten, Janet, and Stephen Hugh-Jones, eds. 1995. *About the House: Levi-Strauss and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Catat, Louis. 1895. *Voyage a Madagascar (1889-1890)*. Paris: Librairie Hachette
- Chandon-Moet, B. 1972. *Vohimasina, Village Malgache: Tradition et Changement dans une Societe Paysanne*. Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines.
- Chavanes, Bertrand. 1969. Aspects de la vie religieuse et sociale dans quelques villages betsimisaraka. *Tany Malagasy* 6:69-94.
- Cole, Jennifer. 1996. *The necessity of forgetting: ancestral and colonial memories in east Madagascar*. PhD thesis, University of California, Berkeley.

- Collier, Jane Fishburne, and Sylvia Junko Yanagisako. 1987. Introduction. In J. F. Collier and S. J. Yanagisako, eds. *Gender and Kinship*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.
- Collins, C. 1897. A Tanala Village. *Antananarivo Annual*, Volume VI, 1897-1900, p350-355.
- Condominas, George. 1960. *Fokon'olona et Collectivites Rurales en Imerina*. Paris: Berger-Levrault.
- Cooper, D. E. 1992. The Idea of Environment. In D.E. Cooper, and J.A. Palmer, eds. *The Environment in Question: Ethics and Global Issues*. London: Routledge.
- Cotte, Paul Vincent. 1947. *Regardons Vivre une Tribu Malgache: Les Betsimisaraka*. Paris: La Nouvelle Edition.
- Covell, Maureen. 1987. *Madagascar: Politics, Economics and Society*. London: Frances Pinter Publications.
- Dahl, Otto Chr. 1951. *Malgache et Maanjaan: Une Comparison Linguistique*. Oslo: Egede Institutett.
- Decary, Raymond. 1951. *Moeurs et coutumes des Malgaches*. Paris: Payot.
- Deschamps, Hubert. 1936. *Les Antaisaka: Geographie Humaine, Coutumes et Histoire d'une Population Malgache*. Antananarivo: Imprimerie Moderne de l'Emyrne, Pitot de la Beaujardiere.
- _____. 1938. Folklore Antaisaka. *Bulletin de l'Academie Malgache* 21:112-129.
- _____. 1960. *Histoire de Madagascar*. Paris: Berger-Levrault.
- _____. 1975. *Roi de la Brousse: Memoires d'Autres Mondes*. Paris: Berger-Levrault.
- Deschamps, Hubert, and Suzanne Vianes. 1959. *Les Malgaches du Sud-Est*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Descola, P. 1992. Societies of Nature and the Nature of Society. In A. Kuper, ed. *Conceptualizing Society*. London and New York: Routledge.
- _____. 1994. *In the Society of Nature: A Native Ecology in Amazonia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Descola, P and G. Palsson, eds. 1996. *Nature and Society: anthropological perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Diksonera. 1973. *Diksonera Malagasy-Englisy*. Antananarivo: Andro Vaovao sy Trano Printy Loterana.
- Douglass, W.A. 1969. *Death in Murelaga: funerary rituals in a Spanish Basque village*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Dubois, Robert. 1968. Signification de la fafy et specificite malgache. *Civilisation Malgache* 2:89-98.
- _____. 1978. *Olombelona: Essai sur l'Existence Personelle et Collective a Madagascar*. Paris: Harmattan.
- Durkheim, Emile, and Marcel Mauss. 1963. *Primitive Classification*. London: Cohen and West.
- Edholm, Felicity. 1976. *Kinship and Social Change among the Antaisaka of Coastal Southeast Madagascar*. PhD thesis, London School of Economics, University of London.
- Eggert, K. 1981. Who are the Mahafaly? Cultural and social misidentifications in southwestern Madagascar. *Omalv sy Anio* 13-14:149-176.
- _____. 1986. Mahafaly as misnomer. In C. Kottak, J-A. Rakotoarisoa, A. Southall, and P. Verin, eds. *Madagascar: Society and History*. Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Elle, Bjorn. 1905-6. Note sur les tribus de la province de Farafangana. *Bulletin de l'Academie Malgache* 4:116-123.

- Elli, Pere Luigi. 1993. *Une civilisation du boeuf: les Bara de Madagascar*. Ambozontany; Fianarantsoa.
- Errington, Shelly. 1989. *Meaning and Power in a Southeast Asian Realm*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Errington, Shelly and Jane Atkinson, eds. 1990. *Power and difference: gender in island Southeast Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Estrade, Jean-Marie. 1985. *Un culte de possession a Madagascar: le tromba*. Paris: Harmattan.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. 1948. *The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Faublee, Jaques. 1954. *La Cohesion des Societes Bara*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- _____. 1968. Structure sociale et facteurs historiques: l'exemple des Antemoro. *Civilisation Malgache* 2:99-111.
- Feeley-Harnik, Gillian. 1978. Divine kingship and the meaning of history among the Sakalava of Madagascar. *Man* 13:402-17.
- _____. 1979. Construction des monuments funeraires dans la monarchie bemihisatra. *Taloha* 8:29-40.
- _____. 1980. The Sakalava house (Madagascar). *Anthropos* 75:559-585.
- _____. 1982. The king's men in Madagascar: slavery, citizenship and Sakalava monarchy. *Africa* 52:31-50.
- _____. 1983. The significance of kinship in Sakalava monarchy. *Omalasy Anio* 17-20: 135-144.
- _____. 1984. The political economy of death: communication and change in Malagasy colonial history. *American Ethnologist* 11:1-19.
- _____. 1986. Ritual and work in Madagascar. In C. Kottak, J-A. Rakotoarisoa, A. Southall, and P. Verin, eds. *Madagascar: Society and History*. Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- _____. 1987. What makes work worth doing. *American Ethnologist* 14:737-751.
- _____. 1989. Cloth and the creation of ancestors in Madagascar. In A. B. Weiner and J. Schneider, eds. *Cloth and Human Experience*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- _____. 1991a. Finding memories in Madagascar. In S. Kuchler and W. Melion, eds. *Images of Memory*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- _____. 1991b. *A Green Estate: Restoring Independence in Madagascar*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Feierman, S. 1996. *Peasant Intellectuals: anthropology and history in Tanzania*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Firth, R. 1936. *We, the Tikopia: a sociological study of kinship in primitive Polynesia*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- Flacourt, Etienne de. 1913. *Histoire de la Grande Ile de Madagascar*. 2nd edn., originally published 1661; reprinted in A. Grandidier et al. eds. *Collection des Ouvrages Anciens Concernant Madagascar*. Vol. 8. Paris: Union Coloniale.
- _____. 1920. *Relation de ce qui s'est passe en Ile de Madagascar depuis l'annee 1642 jusqu'en 1660*. Originally published 1661; reprinted in A. Grandidier et al. eds. *Collection des Ouvrages Anciens Concernant Madagascar*. Vol.9. Paris: Union Coloniale.
- Fontoynony, and E. Raomandahy. 1939. Les Antaifasy (origines, guerres avec les tribus voisins). *Bulletin de l'Academie Malgache* 22:1-28.
- Fortes, Meyer. 1959. *Oedipus and Job in West African religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1970. The structure of unilineal descent groups [1953]. In *Time and Social Structure, and Other Essays*. London: Athlone Press.
- _____. 1987. The concept of the person. In *Religion, morality and the person. Essays on Tallensi religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Fortes, Meyer and E. E. Evans-Pritchard eds. 1940. *African Political Systems*. London: Oxford University Press
- Fox, James J. 1971. Sister's child as plant: metaphors in an idiom of consanguinity. In R. Needham, ed. *Rethinking Kinship and Marriage*. London: Tavistock.
- _____. 1980. Introduction. In J. J. Fox, ed. *The Flow of Life*. Cambridge MS: Harvard University Press.
- _____. 1987. The house as a type of social organisation on the island of Roti. In C. Macdonald, ed. *De la Hutte au Palais*. Paris: Editions du CNRS.
- _____. 1993. Comparative perspectives on Austronesian houses. In J. J. Fox, ed. *Inside Austronesian Houses*. Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.
- Freeman, D. 1958. The family system of the Iban of Borneo. In J. Goody, ed. *The development cycle in domestic groups*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gallieni, General. 1908. *Neuf ans a Madagascar*. Paris.
- Gardenier, William. 1976. *Witchcraft and Sorcery in a Pastoral Society: The Central Sakalava of West Madagascar*. PhD thesis, Rice University. Ann Arbor: Microfilms International.
- Geertz, C. 1973a. The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man. In *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- _____. 1973b. The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of the Mind. In *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- _____. 1973c. Person, time and conduct in Bali. In *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- _____. 1980. *Negara: the theatre state in nineteenth century Bali*. Guildford: Princeton University Press.
- Geertz, Hildred, and Clifford Geertz. 1964. Teknonymy in Bali: parenthood, age-grading and genealogical amnesia. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 94:94-108.
- Gluckman, M. 1983. Rituals of rebellion in south-east Africa. In *Order and rebellion in Tribal Africa*. London.
- Graeber, David. 1995. Dancing with corpses reconsidered: an interpretation of famadihana (in Arivonimamo, Madagascar). *American Ethnologist* 22:258-278.
- Grandidier, A. and Grandidier G. 1908-28. *Ethnographie de Madagascar*. 4 Vols. (part of *Histoire physique, naturelle et politique de Madagascar*). Paris.
- Harris, Olivia. 1982. The dead and the devils among the Bolivian Laymi. In M. Bloch and J. Parry eds. *Death and the regeneration of life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1989. The earth and the state: the sources and meanings of money in Northern Potosi, Bolivia. In M. Bloch and J. Parry eds. *Money and the morality of exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hebert, J-C. 1965. La cosmographie ancienne malgache suivie de l'enumeration des points cardinaux et l'importance du nord-est. *Taloha* 1:83-195.
- Heseltine, Nigel. 1971. *Madagascar*. New York: Praeger.
- Heusch, Luc de. 1981. *Why marry her?: society and symbolic structures*; (translated by J Lloyd). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1982. *Rois nes d'un coeur de vache*. Paris.
- _____. 1985. *Sacrifice in Africa*; (translated by L. O'Brien and A. Morton). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hirsch, Eric, and Michael O'Hanlon, eds. 1995. *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Hocart, A. M. 1927. *Kingship*. London: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 1970. *Kings and councillors: an essay in the comparative anatomy of human society*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Humphrey, Caroline. 1995. Chiefly and Shamanist Landscapes in Mongolia. In Hirsch, Eric, and Michael O'Hanlon, eds. *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Huntington, Richard. 1978. Bara endogamy and incest prohibition. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 134:30-62.
- _____. 1986a. The transformation of the Bara rural economy. In C. Kottak, J-A. Rakotoarisoa, A. Southall, and P. Verin, eds. *Madagascar: Society and History*. Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- _____. 1986b. Bara pastoral kingdoms. *Omalysy Anio* 23-24: 179-186.
- _____. 1988. *Gender and Social Structure in Madagascar*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Huntington, R. and P. Metcalf. 1979. *Celebration of death. The anthropology of mortuary ritual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hurvitz, David. 1980. A Record of Anjoaty History in Voehemar, Madagascar. PhD thesis, Princeton University. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International.
- _____. 1986. The "Anjoaty" and embouchures in Madagascar. In C. Kottak, J-A. Rakotoarisoa, A. Southall, and P. Verin, eds. *Madagascar: Society and History*. Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Julien, Gustave. 1908. *Institutions Politiques et Sociales de Madagascar*. Paris: Librairie Orientale et Americaine.
- Keenan, Elinor. 1974. Norm-makers, norm-breakers: uses of speech by men and women in a Malagasy community. In R. Bauman and J. Sherzer, eds. *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kent, Raymond K. 1970. *Early Kingdoms in Madagascar, 1500-1700*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- _____. 1979. Religion and state: a comparison of Antanosy and Sakalava in the 1600s. In R. Kent, ed. *Madagascar in History*. Albany CA: Foundation of Malagasy Studies.
- Kopytoff, Igor ed. 1987. *The African Frontier: the reproduction of traditional African societies*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Kottak, Conrad Phillip. 1980. *The Past in the Present: History, Ecology, and Cultural Variation in Highland Madagascar*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Knight, E. F. 1893. From Fort Dauphin to Fianarantsoa: notes of a journey in southern Madagascar. *Antananarivo Annual*, Volume V, 1893-1896, p396-401.
- Kuper, H. 1947. *An African aristocracy. Rank among the Swazi*. London.
- _____. 1952. *The Swazi*. London.
- Kus, Susan, and Victor Raharijaona. 1990. Domestic space and the tenacity of tradition among some Betsileo of Madagascar. In S. Kent, ed. *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lambek, Michael. 1981. *Human Spirits: A Cultural Account of Trance in Mayotte*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1992. Taboo as a cultural practice among Malagasy speakers. *Man* 27:245-266.
- _____. 1993. *Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte: Local Discourses of Islam, Sorcery, and Spirit Possession*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- Lan, David. 1985. *Guns & Rain: Guerrillas & Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Lavondes, Henri. 1967. *Bekoropoka: Quelques Aspects de la Vie Familiale et Sociale d'un Village Malgache*. Paris: Mouton.
- Leach, Edmund. 1954. *Political Systems of Highland Burma*. London: Athlone Press.
- Leguevel de Lacombe, B-F. 1840. *Voyage a Madagascar et aux Iles Comores (1832 a 1830)*. Tome 2. Paris: Louis Desessart.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1966. *The Savage Mind*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- _____. 1987. Clan, lineage, house. In *Anthropology and Myth: Lectures 1951-1982*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lienhardt, G. 1961. *Divinity and experience: the religion of the Dinka*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Linton, Ralph. 1928. Culture areas in Madagascar. *American Anthropologist* 30:363-390.
- _____. 1933. *The Tanala, a Hill Tribe of Madagascar*. Chicago IL: Field Museum of Natural History.
- Lombard, Jaques. 1986. Le temps et l'espace dans l'ideologie politique de la royaute Sakalava-Menabe. In C. Kottak, J-A. Rakotoarisoa, A. Southall, and P. Verin, eds. *Madagascar: Society and History*. Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Mack, John. 1986. *Madagascar, the island of the ancestors*. London.
- Mannoni, O. 1956. *Prospero and Caliban: A Study of the Psychology of Colonisation*. London: Methuen.
- Marchand. 1901. Les habitants de la Province de Farafangana. *Revue de Madagascar* 3:481-491, 569-580.
- McKinnon, Susan. 1991. *From a Shattered Sun: Hierarchy, Gender, and Alliance in the Tanimbar Islands*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Middleton, Karen. 1988. *Marriages and Funerals: Some Aspects of Karembola Political Symbolism (South Madagascar)*. D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford.
- _____. 1995. Tombs, umbilical cords, and the syllable fo. In Sandra Evers and Marc Spindler eds. *Cultures of Madagascar: ebb and flow of influences*. International Institute for Asian Studies: Leiden.
- Myers, Fred R. 1986. *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Poirier, Charles. 1939. La tribu des Antaimorona aux rives de la Matitanana. *Memoires de l'Academie Malgache* 28:21-28.
- Rafidison, Roger. 1986. Conquete et penetration coloniales dans la province de Farafangana. *Omalv sy Anio* 23-24: 257-264.
- Raharijaona, Theodore. 1967. Les Antaisaka: des origines a nos jours. *Bulletin de Madagascar* 248:7-26.
- Raison-Jourde, Françoise. ed. 1983. *Les Souverains de Madagascar*. Paris: Karthala.
- Rajaonarivelo, Jean. 1968. Le fanahy. *Civilisation Malgache* 2:11-39.
- Rajohnson, Henri. 1908. Etude sur les Antanosy et les Antandroy. *Bulletin de l'Academie Malgache* 6:177-196.
- Richardson, J. 1885. *A New Malagasy-English Dictionary*. Antananarivo: London Missionary Society.

- Ricoeur, Paul. 1979. The metaphorical process as cognition, imagination, and feeling. In S. Sacks, ed. *On Metaphor*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Rolland, Dominique. 1984. Les Antemoro de la Matitanana. In J-P. Domenichini, J. Poirier, and D. Raheisoanjato, eds. *Ny Razana Tsy Mba Maty: Cultures Traditionnelles Malgaches*. Antananarivo: Editions de la Librairie de Madagascar.
- Rosaldo, M. Z. 1980. *Knowledge and Passion. Ilongot notions of self and social life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ruud, Jorgen. 1960. *Taboo: A Study of Malagasy Customs and Beliefs*. Oslo: Oslo University Press.
- Sahlins, Marshall. 1976. *Culture and Practical Reason*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.
 _____. 1985. *Islands of History*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Sainjon. 1901. Le pays Antanosy. *Revue de Madagascar* 3:844-855.
- Schneider, David. 1968. *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall.
 _____. 1984. *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Sharp, Lesley A. 1993. *The Possessed and the Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sibree, James. 1876. *Southeast Madagascar, Being Notes of a Journey through the Tanala, Taimoro and Taisaka Countries in June and July 1876*. Antananarivo: Printed by Abraham Kingdom.
- Simonse, Simon. 1992. *Kings of Disaster: dualism, centralism and the scapegoat king in southeastern Sudan*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Southall, Aidan. 1986. Common themes in Malagasy culture. In C. Kottak, J-A. Rakotoarisoa, A. Southall, and P. Verin, eds. *Madagascar: Society and History*. Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Sperber, Dan. 1975. *Rethinking Symbolism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strathern, Andrew. 1973. Kinship, descent and locality: some New Guinea examples. In J. Goody, ed. *The Character of Kinship*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 1990. *The gender of the gift. Problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
 _____. 1992. *After Nature: English kinship in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tambiah, S. J. 1969. Animals are good to think and good to prohibit. *Ethnology* 8:423-459.
 _____. 1981. A performative approach to ritual. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65:113-169.
- Thomas, Philip. 1995. Of houses, hearths and granaries: some aspects of gender among the Temanambondro of southeast Madagascar. *Indonesia Circle* 67 (special issue), 340-58.
 _____. 1996. *Place, person and ancestry among the Temanambondro of southeast Madagascar*. PhD thesis, University of London.
 _____. 1997. The water that blesses, the river that flows: place and the ritual imagination among the Temanambondro of southeast Madagascar. In J. J. Fox, ed. *The Poetic Power of Place*. Canberra: Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University.

- Thompson, Virginia, and Richard Adloff. 1965. *The Malagasy Republic*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.
- Toussaint, G. 1912. Kibory Antaisaka. *Bulletin de l'Academie Malgache* 10:378.
- Verin, Pierre. 1975. Austronesian contributions to the culture of Madagascar: some archaeological problems. In H. Neville Chittick, and Robert I. Rotberg, eds., *East Africa and the Orient: cultural synthesis in pre-colonial times*. New York and London: Africana
- _____. 1990. *Madagascar*. Paris: Karthala.
- Verin, Pierre, and Narivelo Rajaonarimanana. 1991. Divination in Madagascar: the Antemore case and the diffusion of divination. In P. M. Peek, ed. *African Divination Systems*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Wilson, Peter J. 1967. Tsimihety kinship and descent. *Africa* 35:133-154.
- _____. 1971. Sentimental structure: Tsimihety migration and descent. *American Anthropologist* 73:193-208.
- _____. 1992. *Freedom by a Hair's Breadth: Tsimihety in Madagascar*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Woodburn, James. 1982. Social dimensions of death in four African hunting and gathering societies. In M. Bloch and J. Parry eds. *Death and the regeneration of life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yanagisako, Sylvia Junko, and Jane Fishburne Collier. 1987. Toward a unified analysis of gender and kinship. In J. F. Collier and S. J. Yanagisako, eds. *Gender and Kinship*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.