

**Knowledge, Education and Social
Differentiation amongst the Betsileo
of Fisakana, Highland Madagascar**

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Doctor of Philosophy

2001

Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic study of a village in Fisakana, an area of highland Madagascar where the institution of formal education has had great social, economic and cultural influence.

Although the principal means of subsistence in Fisakana is wet rice cultivation, a severe shortage of good land has led to large-scale emigration. Schooling has provided opportunities for social and spatial mobility that have shaped the character of the region.

Migration and movement are dominant themes in the ethnography of Madagascar. The thesis examines three different types of migration in Fisakana. Each entails a different type of relationship between the migrants and their ancestral land. These are discussed in the context of other literature dealing with this topic in the anthropology of Madagascar.

The region is characterised by inequalities of wealth. People working in the professional sector have prospered economically in comparison to those dependent on agriculture. This thesis makes an original contribution to the literature on social and economic differentiation in the highlands by treating the subject from an ethnographic perspective. The role of formal education in widening socio-economic differentiation is explored in detail. Then the thesis studies how this differentiation is elaborated symbolically through the building of houses and tombs. It also points out the ambiguous nature of tomb ceremonies: whilst ostensibly symbolising social unity and cohesion, they also imply fissure and exclusion.

The thesis then examines the Betsileo social construction of knowledge. Through an exploration of what is learned inside and outside the classroom the thesis shows how local notions of traditional and foreign knowledge articulate with missionary, colonial and post-colonial ideologies of schooling, and with the social and spatial differentiation and displacement produced by formal education.

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For my father and mother

&

Ho an-dRadada sy Ramama

Preface

In late 1997 I arrived at Ramama and Radada's house in Ambohipo dragging a large suitcase. I had visited there briefly twice before, both times with my old friend Solo, who had invited me to do fieldwork in his home village, although he no longer lived there. He assured me that, as his adopted brother, his family would be delighted to have me. But I urged him to write and ask their permission. There was no need, he said. I asked that he at least write a letter to warn them of my arrival, and he agreed. A few weeks later he put me on a bus with my luggage, and told the driver to drop me off at Ambohipo. Ramama and Radada were pleased to see me again. Solo's sister Rasoa immediately invited me to stay in her house, where there was a spare room. Glancing at my luggage, they asked how long I had come to stay. I realised then that they had not received Solo's letter; I suspect now that he never sent it, for he was sure of the welcome I would receive. I stayed for eighteen months.

Ramama and Radada adopted me as the sixth of their eleven children, guiding me with kindness, patience and indulgence. Rasoa looked after me as her little brother. She nursed me through typhoid, corrected my faux pas, sent me on errands, and steered me away from girls with a reputation for witchcraft. She and her husband Rajean-Ba took me into their home and their lives as though it involved nothing more than the cooking of an extra portion of rice. I was part of a family of sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and in-laws; and I continue to be so. Their openness and generosity of spirit remain with me.

It therefore seems inappropriate to hide their identity by changing their names, as is often the convention in anthropology. Villagers not of my close family, though, appear under pseudonyms. But I have not changed the name of the village, nor of the valley, Sahamadio, nor of the towns at either end of it, Fandriana and Miadanimerina. Malagasy names are long and rhythmic, though

perhaps rather difficult for the uninitiated. The fact that Betsileo personal names often begin with the prefix Ra, which denotes respect, can make them hard to tell apart. The trick is to look beyond the Ra. Some names are adapted from French names: thus François becomes Rafarantsoa. I was known as Lioka, or sometimes as Ralioka. I have been economical with my use of Malagasy vocabulary, and have usually simply translated terms that have a direct equivalent in English. However, there are six words used in this thesis which resist straightforward translation, and these I have retained in their Malagasy form. An approximation of their meaning is given in the glossary, but their multiple meanings will emerge as they are encountered in the context of the text.

I have been tremendously fortunate in the financial and academic support I have received in the preparation of this thesis. The dissertation was funded by a Research Studentship from the ESRC, to whom I express my gratitude. In Antananarivo, Michel Razafiarivony of the Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie provided many useful ideas, and was instrumental in securing my research visa. In Fianarantsoa, I spent happy and useful hours with François Noiret SJ discussing our common love for the Betsileo. The Department of Anthropology at the LSE has a deserved reputation for intellectual rigour, from which I have greatly benefitted. Amongst my postgraduate peers I am particularly grateful to Catherine Allerton, Jo de Berry, Peggy Froerer, Eva Keller, Jerome Lewis, Ed Simpson and Shu-Yuan Yang for their committed critical commentary. My greatest intellectual debt is of course to my supervisors. Maurice Bloch's clarity of vision and mind steered me gently onwards when I was lacking in both; his profound knowledge and love of Madagascar and the Malagasy have deepened my own. Rita Astuti's gift for clear, counter-intuitive thought and her eye for detail have sharpened my intellectual and ethnographic method; her input has been the model of constructive criticism. This thesis represents but a fraction of my supervisors' influence on me and my thinking. Both have provided warm and generous support throughout this project, much of it under unreasonable time pressures

largely of my own making. Any inaccuracies, inadequacies, inconsistencies, illogicalities or incompleteness are entirely my fault.

The contribution of my family and friends, both in Britain and Madagascar has been immeasurable. The late Josephine Toynbee gave me much early encouragement and the benefit of her very sharp mind. Ursula Freeman was responsible for the layout and presentation of the original text, and Ernest Buckley for technological wizardry. Ramama, Radada, Rasoa, Rajean-Ba and Solo are responsible, above all others, for making this project possible.

Chapter One

Introduction

Ambohipo: a northern Betsileo village

Up onto the high ridge that runs the eastern length of the valley of Sahamadio come sounds floating across the rice plain: the dull thud of rice-pounding; a small girl's shriek; the homeward strumming of a cowherd's banjo. Someone somewhere is building, his hammering bouncing back and forth east to west, west to east. An engine grinds north up the mud and stone road from Miadanimerina.

The whole landscape is the work of the spade - rice fields and ox pounds, ditches and dykes, terraced fields staircasing up to the valley top. It is an intensely human landscape, crowded with fields and houses, schools and churches, carts and cattle. The villages cling mainly to the steep eastern edge, the faces of the mud-brick houses watching westwards across the flat expanse of rice fields in the valley bottom, reddening with the evening sunfall - Ambatolahy, Ambohitraivo, Ambohitrinibe.

On the shallower western edge there are villages, too. The road drops steeply down from Ankilahila, then crosses the plain via the dyke just before the large, square parish church at Milamaina. A quarter of a mile on to Ankerambe and the dam where girls are washing clothes, then a further quarter mile to Ambohipo, spreading itself across a hillock as if the ground had pushed up from underneath. Here, halfway up the valley, in the heart of the valley, stands Ambohipo - 'the hill at the heart'.

From the ridge the whole geography of the village is visible - and with its geography, its history and its anthropology. At the northern fringe are the large empty houses of the wealthy Lutherans. Towards us to the east is a ring of mature eucalyptus which are growing in the round ditch enclosing the original village of Ambohipo, now surrounded by more recent settlement. At the top of the village we see the iron roof and spire of the Catholic church, rusted ochre to

the colour of the land; the ruins of the Catholic mission, the football pitch grazed by long-horned zebu whose schoolboy cowherds kick a bag-ball haphazardly through the couch grass and cow pats; the crumbling three-storey ugliness of Rapaoly's school. Then there are some tombs, one unfinished. Beside the cart track to Vohitromby are the Lutheran church and the state primary school, hidden amongst eucalyptus. To the east, a pile of bricks marks where Cadet has been planning for years to build his country home in his long-left village. Closer to the east are the tall, ageing houses of Ambalamahasoa and the huge village tomb where someone is spreading out her washing to dry on the single-slab roof which took a year to lever from Ankitsikitsika. Back to the main street, past the youth club building which the mayor uses for a house and we see on the crest of the hill the long low line of the *hopitaly* which has never had doctors or nurses or drugs or even beds but which once nearly had a midwife and so has nevertheless kept its name. Finally, behind the hospital, to the west, distanced from the main village by an acre of manioc and groundnuts, is the small and shabby grass-roofed hamlet of Tongotrazo - a place apart.

Everything about Ambohipo is revealed in its geography. So what follows introduces in more detail the different quarters of the village, and the people who live there.

Antanimangahazo

Let us start with Radolphe, squatting on the kitchen floor, concentratedly pounding tobacco and wood ash, a teaspoon of South Shropshire honey in his toothless mouth. Ralala, his wife, stokes the fire from a low stool and coughs again from deep in her chest. For forty years they have pounded paraky, stoked the fire and raised children in this smoky kitchen. His ancestors founded Ambohipo, moving west across the valley from Ambohitraivo to open up new land. They dug a round ditch on the brow of the hill, built inside it and cultivated outside. A century later they are surrounded on three sides by Ambohipo's other descent group, the Twelve Men, to whom they

once gave a wife and a stretch of land in the village. Long ago in the days when you gave away land.

Radolphe, the youngest of eleven, married Ralala in Milamaina parish church on 20th April 1952. She was the prettiest girl in the village (he says) and as an only child she brought a good set of rice fields with her. This marriage was slightly unusual in that she was born into the Twelve Men descent group, who are not known for marrying out. But she saw something special in Radolphe - perhaps his quiet, unspoken intelligence and a gift for growing things.

He has the greenest fingers in Ambohipo. In his kitchen garden there are onions, salad, an avocado tree, tomatoes, a tree that seems to bear blackberries. But most of Radolphe's days are spent in his grandfather's fields a little way from the village to the northwest. This land he has terraced from pasture into rows of pineapples, manioc, groundnuts, beans, peas and rice beds in a valley that runs east-west and catches the sun all day. One morning he found someone had been stealing the manioc: 'That's okay,' he said, 'we have enough.' Now nearly seventy, Radolphe is a *ray aman'dreny* (elder) of Ambohipo. But he plays little part in village politics, preferring to comment from a distance with detached irony, and to cultivate his garden.

But his eldest son, Léonard, is extremely influential. Radolphe and Ralala lived modestly and saved hard to put him through Catholic mission primary school, the state secondary school and lycée, before he won himself a scholarship to agricultural college, half of which he spent on renewing his parents' thatch roof with pantiles. On leaving college, Léonard worked as an agricultural engineer for the rural development department of the Protestant Church. He married a Lutheran from the nearby market town of Fandriana. Within five years he was head of his department, and went on to transform it into the richest and most dynamic NGO working in Madagascar. It is thanks to Léonard that Ambohipo has standpipes throughout the village, supplying water from a spring one mile to the west.

He travelled abroad and made contacts, attracting funds from the United States and Europe, where his sharp brain and easy manner

made him the donors' darling. His earning power enabled him to put his younger brothers and sisters through school and university. He has built two houses for himself in the village. One stands empty and the other is lived in by his elder sister and her husband, who cultivate his land while Léonard himself lives in a big house on the outskirts of Antananarivo, drives a plush saloon car and has recently taken a second wife in her early twenties.

Twenty yards to the east of Radolphe's house, inside the round ditch, lives Ramarovavy, widow of Radolphe's elder brother, Rasamoelina. She was originally married to the Chinese shopkeeper in Fandriana but was sent away due to her inability to read and write and do sums. So Rasamoelina married her, reckoning the ex-wife of a Chinaman to be a good catch. His father was unhappy about this, pointing out that she was from Ankadintany, where the people are well known as traders, and as such to be liars and thieves. Father and son argued, but the son would not relent and went off to the forest in the east to earn the brideprice. When he came back his father had died and been buried. It was too late to make up.

Rasamoelina and Ramarovavy's children have never achieved the same academic and professional success as Radolphe and Ralala's. Rose, their third daughter, who has only a primary school certificate, says her parents were too poor to fund their schooling. Only one, the youngest son, Roland, went to university. He used his grant to help his family back in the village, leaving himself with not enough to eat. Malnutrition and overwork led to a *crise* (breakdown) and to him abandoning his studies. He now lives with his mother in Ambohipo.

Ramarovavy's family make a large part of their living by selling food and fruit on the porch of the *hopitaly* to people walking to the Saturday market in Fandriana. The *hopitaly* is a fine place to hang out on a Saturday afternoon. Ramarovavy sells buns, Raberthe, her daughter by the Chinese shopkeeper, sells potato cakes, Niraina, a daughter-in-law also from Ankadintany, sells fruit. Rajaona, Niraina's rather simple husband sits in the porch, greets when greeted, and

laughs, fractionally late, at others' jokes. Rose, roundish and smiling, heats coffee on a charcoal stove and sells rum from a jerrycan in a basket, keeping one red-rimmed eye out for the unlikely appearance of the forces of law and order. Young men home from market stop for a round of drinks and to eye the passing girls. Rasamson, president of the village, squats chatting on the sunny verge in his greatcoat, and Dadarivo always gets drunk and argues and uses filthy language and is steered off west uphill to Añara staggering and whooping across the rice fields.

The Commandant

In the late afternoons of my early days in Ambohipo, my sister Kaneny would take me visiting. One time, as we wandered down the street, unsure where we were going that day, she pointed out the Commandant among a group of men propping up the counter of Berodo's shop. 'You should talk to him,' she said, 'he won't be here for long.' 'Go on then,' I urged, 'introduce me.'

A short, broad man, wearing grey jogging bottoms and a charming, open grin, the Commandant shook my hand with warmth; I sensed he knew who I was, but I had not yet placed him. I knew him only by his house, the great square tin-rooved green-shuttered house that kept his name in the village even though he was seldom there in person. Now I had a face to go with the house.

'He wants to talk to you,' Kaneny told him - somewhat ungraciously, I thought.

'Then come into the house,' he said with his easy and generous affability. Kaneny slipped off to chat with a girl friend. The Commandant took me in, up concrete steps through a neat cypressa hedge and into a downstairs drawing room where he opened the shutters to let the dusky half-light seep onto the sparse, tidy furniture: three armchairs upholstered in red plastic, a low coffee table, bare walls, nothing else.

I introduced myself, giving my *raison d'être* in Ambohipo, showing him my notebook full of kinship diagrams and long Betsileo

names. I apologised for my poor Malagasy, and the Commandant suggested we speak French. I agreed, out of curiosity. I handed him my notebook and in it, on a new page, he wrote his name in neat old-fashioned cursive colonial script: Commandant Razafindrainibe Ephrem Joseph. Directeur Administratif et Financier Adjoint. Centre Hospitalier de Soavalala, followed by his work and home telephone numbers in Antananarivo. 'You can call me any time you are in Antananarivo,' he said, 'we are kin.' (Yes, he was who I thought he was: my father's brother's son.)

We talked of the land and the people. 'A rich intellect but a poor soil,' he explained. 'People were better off when the *vazaha* (Europeans - see glossary) were here, but now the government cannot afford to pay the civil service.' Nevertheless, he worked for the government, in the military hospital, and was steering his son into a professional training.

I admired the house.

'Parents expect their sons to leave something visible in the village. They are ashamed if their children simply up and leave. My father sold the land he had farmed for thirty years near Tsiroanomandidy to help me build this. He died two years ago just after we had put the roof on. 'J'ai vu le chapeau de la maison de mon fils,' he said.'

Those thirty years had been spent farming the wider, more fertile lands of the mid-west, saving money to send back to a wife and three children in Ambohipo. Much of that money had paid for school fees, particularly those of the able Ephrem Josef who passed through the Ambohipo Catholic Mission, then spent a year at the Sacred Heart school in Fandriana, then the Catholic Mission in Ambatolampy, before taking his baccalauréat at the public lycée in Fianarantsoa. From there he went straight into the army, opting to train as a nurse. He won two scholarships to study in France in the 1980s and came back to join the administration, rising to his present position of deputy director of the large military hospital in Antananarivo.

And the children?

‘They are still studying. They come back here for holidays. They lived here when they went to school in Fandriana, but now they are in Antananarivo they are really only *demi-paysan*. I try to encourage them on the land, so they don’t forget. But the land is poor here and they will be professional people. When I was a boy we hardly had money for clothes. We had shorts and bare feet.’

He was returning to Antananarivo the next day so I gave him a letter to post. I saw the Commandant two or three more times, always in the village, never in Antananarivo. He would always laugh at this irony: ‘You here in the village, me in the city. It’s all mixed up.’ I had become his country cousin.

Ambaniavaratra

At the north edge of Ambohipo, where the track comes down to meet the valley road, are the large and opulent houses of Ambaniavaratra. Perhaps on her balcony will be sitting the large and opulent matron, Raharisoa, greeting and being greeted by the passers-by, inviting them all, out of form, to come in, and they, out of form, declining.

It is a huge brick house with a yellow tin roof and a granary downstairs. Raharisoa’s family are not farmers or traders. They farmed once, perhaps a hundred years ago, before the French arrived and needed a civil service. But for the last three generations they have worked in the government, being pulled around the country as nurses, engineers, civil servants. Over this time they have hardly lived in the village, but they still have some large houses, family rice fields and a family tomb. Other villagers tend their fields as sharecroppers. This enables them to live and work in Madagascar’s big cities while returning only two or three times a year for Christmas, tomb ceremonies or to supervise the rice harvest. Ravalitera Samoela became a government nurse in the 1930s and spent thirty years in Toliara and Ambositra, where his eldest two sons were born. Their father took them home to Ambohipo to marry their cross-cousins, the sisters Raharisoa and Ralalasoa. Ravalitera Samoela’s sons all found

work in the civil service. Raharisoa's husband was a mining engineer, another brother was the head of a local education authority, another worked as a senior manager in the tax office, while a fourth became Deputy Minister of Education. From his big desk in a big government building in Antananarivo he would always look after the schoolteachers of Ambohipo. Should the local education authority ever try to post them outside their native village he would simply pick up his telephone and dispatch a directive to the opposite effect, thus saving them from *affectation* to the steamy malarial depths of the forest or the dry bandit-ridden mid-west.

Raharisoa

Raharisoa was big and friendly. Smiling at me out of a huge armchair she put me instantly at ease as we sat talking in an upstairs drawing room floored and furnished in the dark woods of the forest, and reached by a broad hardwood staircase sweeping upstairs from the gloomy hall. French windows stood open onto the balcony where Gobera leant on the yellow balustrade absently surveying the threshers in the yard below. A maid scuttled through on her way to the kitchen.

Raharisoa was visiting the village for the rice harvest. Not that she worked in the fields. I suspect she had not set foot in a field since childhood, if then. But she was here to supervise, to make sure that the harvest was dried and stored, and the labourers paid, and the sharecroppers from Tongotrazo given their share of the crop. She was also there to see family, to bring medicine for her brother-in-law Rageorges, to keep an eye on her wayward nephew Batota, and to talk to the pastor about plans for the new bell tower of the Lutheran church.

Raharisoa was confident, travelled and urbane. Accustomed to Europeans, she talked to me with a matter-of-factness untraced by the wonder or timidity I sometimes found amongst residents of Ambohipo.

'And where will your studies lead you?' she enquired.

Nothing about crops or livestock, field sizes or toms, but a straightforward and obvious question from one educated person to another. For this was her world, and more particularly the world of her children: six out of eight had university degrees; none of them lived in the village, nor ever would they. And neither had Raharisoa in her adult life.

She and her sister Ralalasoa had grown up, gone to school, and married in the village. But the brothers they married were born to an Ambohipo civil servant posted in Ambositra. Raharisoa's husband trained as a mining engineer and spent most of his working life being posted to remote diggings, leaving Raharisoa alone in Antananarivo raising a third generation of civil servants, doctors and engineers. Whereas she had at least started her childhood and schooldays in Ambohipo (at the Lutheran mission), her own children were educated exclusively in Antananarivo. This was reflected in their professional status.

There were four daughters: one worked in civil aviation in Paris, had access to cheap aeroplane tickets, and had flown her mother over to visit her and her French-Malagasy husband, the son of a French colonist; another daughter was a doctor in Antananarivo; the other two worked there in administration. Two of Raharisoa's sons had spent six years studying in the then Soviet Union: one ran his own transport company in Toamasina, the other was an engineer at the cotton factory in Antsirabe; the youngest son was still at medical school; the other son, the one now leaning on the balcony, had trained as an electrician. I later discovered that he had never finished university, something of a disappointment in that family, and spent too much of his time drinking too much rum. On his brief visit to Ambohipo he formed an ever-present figure amongst the passing weekend trade at Rose's rum dispensary on the hospital porch.

As we were talking, another son, Seth, the cotton engineer, strolled in, bouncing with confidence on his air-soled trainers. His mother introduced him proudly and he slumped heavily in another armchair, sticking out his legs across the room and folding his hands

across his belly revealing an oversized diver's watch hanging loosely on his wrist. He too talked to me with confidence and lack of restraint, perhaps slightly affected for my benefit, but with perfect courtesy and only the mildest look of gentle condescension at my scruffy trousers and bare feet. He had driven his mother to the village in his Peugeot estate; Raharisoa did not take the *taxi-brousse*. After a short chat he got up and left.

Rasoa had once been strongly critical of Seth for driving to market in a half-full car and not stopping to pick up Ambohipo villagers en route. (She called them *havana* - kin, which they were in a very extended sort of way). It struck me that Seth's acquaintance with Ambohipo and its residents was so slight that he probably did not fully know who was 'kin' and who was not. But in a way, this was just Rasoa's point: it was one's duty to know one's kin and to help them; not to do so seemed, to her, haughty, and typical of *ampielezana* (educated migrants).

The connection with the village was weakening. Ambohipo was where Raharisoa was from, but it was not where she lived; for her children it was a place they occasionally visited. However, there were still large plots of family land, hence Raharisoa's return during the rice harvest. This was ancestral land, but it had been a long time since Raharisoa's family had actually farmed it themselves. Nowadays it was mostly planted and harvested by day-labourers organised by Raharisoa's brother-in-law Rageorges, the only one never to have left the village. The remainder was sharecropped by people from Tongotrazo; this arrangement had been in force for some generations and almost certainly originated in a master-slave relationship. This was not a topic I felt I could raise with Raharisoa. I was curious to know who would care for the land after she and Rageorges no longer could, and I suspected that it would be Seth. If he found it too difficult to organise labourers, the easiest thing would be to give over a greater proportion to the sharecroppers of Tongotrazo, thus retaining the title but avoiding the hassle. Besides, as the family became more prosperous and scattered, the material value to them of the village rice

diminished in proportion to its symbolic value as the product of ancestral fields.

This equation did not seem to sit uncomfortably with Raharisoa. Her life had only ever been partly in the village; her real enthusiasms lay beyond Ambohipo: visiting her daughter in France, seeing her son qualify as a doctor. One continuing connection was the church. I guessed she would be one of the major donors to the funding of the new bell tower. So I mentioned the renovations.

She smiled broadly. 'That is so when I die the door will be wide enough to bring my body into the church,' she joked. 'It is the church of my ancestors. This is the land of my ancestors. I will be buried in the tomb of my ancestors.'

And I realised that that was all she really had left in Ambohipo: ancestors. And a great big house.

But not all the Ravalitera family have left Ambohipo. One who has never been far is Rageorges, a rather serious and dour old man in his early sixties, who was born with a twisted foot. Because of this he has lived in Ambohipo all his life, playing the organ in the Lutheran church until it was replaced with a Yamaha brought to the village by a nephew. The Ravalitera family are also notable for being Lutheran in a village that is eighty per cent Catholic. The Lutheran church in Ambohipo was the first church of any kind in the valley of Sahamadio, Ambohipo being chosen by the Norwegian pastor Nygaard in 1873 for its central location. The Catholics arrived twenty years later. Most of the Lutheran congregation do not in fact come from Ambohipo, but from surrounding villages, leaving the Ravaliteras fairly isolated religiously. But denominational difference is not just a Sunday affair, for it has great social significance in Ambohipo. The Lutherans and the Catholics do not marry each other - in fact cross-denominational marriage used to lead to excommunication. Thirty years ago, children attending the rival Lutheran and Catholic mission schools would sometimes insult and attack each other. Visits between their parents were very limited. When the Catholic mission closed down, Catholic

parents refused to send their children to the Lutheran school in Ambohipo, making them walk three miles to Miadanimerina instead. The present pastor is pleased to see more ecumenical activity recently. Not everybody is, though: when Randriamanga married Radolphe's fifth daughter, Beby, a Catholic, the staunchly Lutheran Rageorges refused to attend the service.

Antanety

At the top of Ambohipo, between the Catholic church and the southern edge of the village is another prosperous quarter. The houses here are large, too, with good stone foundations and walls of new brick. As with the Ravaliteras, the Ravosons have made their money through professional careers, mainly as schoolteachers. The first to do this was Ravophillipe, who married an older sister of Radolphe's, Raivdelphine, in the 1920s. Ravophillipe taught at the *École des Frères Chrétiennes* (known for their black garb as 'the crows') in Antananarivo in the 1930s. He was, I believe, the first schoolteacher in the village to emigrate and make money from his profession, and by the time of his retirement in the 1960's he was known to be the wealthiest man in Ambohipo. Ravophillipe had four sons: the twins Alphonse and Michel, both schoolteachers, Jostène who was a dentist, and Rapaoly who trained to be a vet, later became mayor, and built the huge, crumbling and deserted breezeblock school that stands staring at the village from the western end of the football pitch. This was a wealthy and upwardly mobile family: a photograph of Alphonse taken in the 1950s shows him posing in the village street in a full-length leather coat and sunglasses. Michel was a skilled mathematician who taught in Ambohipo and Antananarivo. His son and daughter both became teachers in Ambohipo secondary school; nine of his other ten children gained their baccalauréat and left the village to work as teachers, doctors and managers, three working as engineers for Léonard's development department.

Ravoson Michel's eldest son, Ravoson Xavier, is director of the state secondary school, which sits high up on the western bank of

the valley and which serves seven nearby villages. Xavier's older sister, Madame Françoise, teaches maths at the same school. She is remarkable for her slightly suburban way of dressing, her shaded spectacles and her short, wavy hair - she is the only woman in the village not to have long hair. She is never seen in a rice field except to cross it in her court shoes on the way to school. Her husband, Rajosefa, teaches maths and Malagasy at the same school. A very black man with a purplish-red lower lip, he rarely ventures out of their large brick and tile house except to slip through the eucalyptus at dusk to enjoy a few drinks at Rose and Naivolava's house with his drinking mate, Naivobal. Naivolava runs the house as a kind of bar where anyone from the village can come and buy a drink. Once a week he takes a team of young men into the forest where they fill up their twenty-litre jerrycans at unofficial distilleries and then carry them home twelve hours through the night.

Rajosefa himself comes from a well educated family. His father, Rakotosolofo, came from a land-owning family, but trained as a teacher and worked all over the island. Six of Rajosefa's thirteen siblings teach at lycée and only one, Rosolondrasana Piera, still lives in the village, having suffered a *crise* due to the pressures of sitting his baccalauréat ten times without success. He lives with his mother and spends his days relentlessly collecting and chopping firewood, always wearing the same too-tight light-blue sweatshirt. He is slightly overweight and is losing his front teeth to decay. He never talks for long, as he always has more chopping to do.

Rapaoly

No single person had such influence in Ambohipo as the mayor, Rapaoly; no character was so pervasive as his; nobody ignited such controversy as he: Rapaoly was unique. Without necessarily being visible he was nevertheless omnipresent, existing as much on other people's lips as he did in substance; thus my fieldnotes were full of him long before I ever met him.

Rapaoly's omnipresence was due to his desire, need even, to be involved - some would say to interfere - in major areas of village life: politics, law, the church, education. His dominance in these fields was due to a combination of qualities: an intelligent mind, a strong self-belief, and a gift for blending the rhetoric of ancestral ways with the know-how of modern government.

He was the best speaker in Ambohipo - persuasive, ingenious, and he wielded a stock of proverbs, which gave his arguments the hallmark of ancestral authority. For this reason Radolphe asked him to speak on behalf of the bride-giving family at his daughter's wedding. Rapaoly completely outspoke and outwitted the groom's representative. He placed his opponent on the defensive from the start by letting him begin and then pointing out that it was taboo in this village to start such proceedings without an invocation to the ancestors. He then demanded a raising of the brideprice as reparation for the transgression. From then on the groom's speaker was on the back foot as Rapaoly released strings of proverbs, invoked ancestral precedents and belittled his adversary with an ironic display of exaggerated politesse. In short, he did the family proud; and as Radolphe was his mother's brother, he had a duty to do so.

He was an educated man, coming from a family of schoolteachers, although not a teacher himself. As a young man in the 1960s Rapaoly was sent by the government to work as a vet in the Morondava region. During this time he became politically active, using his trips into the bush to campaign against the independence agreement which gave Madagascar political independence but little financial or educational autonomy. As a result he was sacked from his government post but took his case to the high court, where he represented himself, and won an unlikely victory over the Minister of the Interior and an award of 1.5 million *ariary*. Using this huge sum of money, Rapaoly founded a new school in Ambohipo - the *Sekoly Fandrosoana*, Development School. The school was built on land belonging to Rakotobe's father and using manpower from the village in exchange for which Rapaoly offered their children free schooling.

However, when it came to inscription, it appears that Rapaoly reneged on this agreement.

The Director was his brother Michel, who taught maths and kept the books. However, the two fell out as Rapaoly sought greater control over matters financial. Michel left, but nobody else in the family would agree to be Director, leaving the school closed and empty for many years. It was eventually re-opened by a schoolteacher called Donason who renamed it *École Sainte Sylvie* and agreed to buy it from Rapaoly in instalments. A dispute over the instalments ended up in court, and during the long lawsuit the school was left unused and crumbling once more.

Rapaoly's knowledge of law was totally self-taught and he entered enthusiastically into lawsuits. He had a bizarre dispute with the electricity company over some old electricity poles, which, as mayor, he claimed as his own. There was a Jarndyce versus Jarndyce-length battle with the Lutheran Church over land they claimed as their own but which Rapaoly had planted with eucalyptus following a directive under the First Republic, aimed at increasing land use, that any uncultivated land would thenceforth belong to the person who cultivated it. He also provided legal representation for villagers involved in land disputes, and took payment in land if he won.

Rapaoly's other sphere of activity was politics. His mayoralty incorporated Ambohipo and seven other villages. Over this area he exercised a somewhat idiosyncratic authority. For example, he appointed his own choice as president of the village, installing the elderly and compliant Rasamson as a conduit for his own directives. Rapaoly's political ambitions had in the past extended further than the valley: he had once stood unsuccessfully for the Chamber of Deputies and had even initiated a campaign for the office of President of the Republic but could not afford to raise the necessary deposit.

Ordinary villagers had an ambivalent attitude towards the mayor. Whilst they frequently relied on his legal expertise and political connections, they nevertheless were distrustful of him. There was something obscure about the processes of law and government

that was beyond the reach of those without his level of education. The same magic that he showed in manipulating the law and the state in their favour, could always be turned against them. For this reason, the mayor was at once the most powerful and most morally ambiguous person in Ambohipo. That is partly why he was the subject of so much talk.

Rapaoly was one of the people in Ambohipo with the greatest knowledge of the history of the village and its ancestors. Or at least he professed to be. I wanted to hear these stories from him so I called at his house, which had formerly been the youth club, but which he, through some obscure process, had made his own. He was busy and we made an appointment for two days time.

His house was furnished with the red plastic upholstered armchairs of the rural bourgeoisie, a large portrait of ex-president Zafy Albert and a television set long idle due to lack of power supply. He responded to my questions with an air of deliberate authority, as if he were the only person who knew these things, and indeed I had flattered him that he was. He told me briefly of the ancestors who first settled on the hilltop at Vohitsoa, and then counted me through the generations to the founding of Ambohipo and on to Rainilaikisoa at the time of the missionaries. I mentioned that it was said he had these stories written down in a book, and hinted how interested I would be to read it - if at all possible. Firmly and politely he refused.

His reasons for refusing are his own. When I told Rasoa she wrinkled her nose and said, 'It's all of our story but he thinks he owns it.'

And in a way he did.

Ambalamahasoia

Ambalamahasoia is the piece of land given by Radolphe's ancestors as a dowry soon after they founded Ambohipo inside the round ditch. Soon after that, descendants of the Twelve Men built the big tomb in the village centre upon that very land. The tomb is now so packed with ancestors that they lie in their bundles stacked three high on the stone

slabs, covered in a plastic sheet to protect them from the dripping roof. Recently some families have built new tombs in another part of the village, but most do not have the means to do this and so go on cramming them into the old tomb.

To the east of the tomb are the large but shabby houses of Ambalamahasoia. These are typical northern Betsileo country houses. There are two or three large, musty, dusty rooms downstairs for storing grain, spades, pestles and mortars, and chickens. A steep and narrow ladder emerges through the floor of the veranda onto the upstairs balcony, off which are one or two rooms with raffia mats for sleeping, baskets of clothes, perhaps an old tin trunk and then a kitchen with walls smoked black by years of damp firewood.

Compared to Ambaniavaratra, Antanety or even Antanimangahazo, Ambalamahasoia is poor. Once the home of the village's landed gentry, its people have multiplied without prospering, dividing the land to be inherited into ever smaller units. Whereas other quarters have prospered through education and professional careers, Ambalamahasoia has remained mostly uneducated. The story of Radaniel illustrates this.

An only child, Radaniel married another only child, Georgine. They had thirteen sons and one daughter, none of whom succeeded beyond secondary school and many of whom have had troubled lives. One stole a pig twenty years ago and was ordered out of the village by the elders citing an ancestral edict - he has never returned; another got the schoolmaster's daughter pregnant; another has emigrated to the forest leaving his wife and children behind; another just sells bad rum from his house; a younger son is struggling with recurrent syphilis.

Radaniel's only daughter, Razalucie, was brought up by her grandmother. One day she left Ambohipo and went to live with a divorced Merina man near Betafo, one hundred miles to the west. She never received her grandmother's blessing to leave, and was never accepted by the stepchildren. She gave birth to seven children of her own before she died from a miscarriage. Her family put this down to

the stepdaughter poisoning the drinks given to her during the late stages of her pregnancy.

Razalucie's body and children were brought back to Ambohipo immediately after her death. She was buried the following day. Rasoa says she saw something white in her mouth as she wrapped the body. The children have no land, since the land bought by their mother in Betafo is claimed by their father for his children by his first wife. They have only very basic schooling. One is a deaf mute.

One day soon after the harvest two of Razalucie's children went down to the ricefields in the valley to fish for minnows for their supper. Their cousins were already there and told them to go away: 'You can't fish here - your rice fields are in Betafo.' They went home crying.

It is fair to say that Radaniel, although an elder, is not the most respected man in the village. He is known more as a hard drinker than a hard worker. Some of his grandchildren have been seen smoking marijuana. He started his life with a lot of land but now hardly has enough to eat. He was once accused of stealing rice seedlings and selling them at Ambohimanandriana for half their value. No action was taken as he is an old man who could have mistakenly picked up someone else's bunch of seedlings in the evening light. He and his sister are both said to practise witchcraft and to go abroad at night.

Tongotrazo

Although they are distinct quarters within the village, Antanimangahazo, Ambaniavaratra, Antanety and Ambalamahaso are nevertheless contiguous. The borders are only loosely defined, as much by kinship as by geography. But Tongotrazo, stranded out to the west of the main village across two fields of manioc and groundnuts, is physically a place apart. And yet the picture of Ambohipo is not complete without it.

Ravao's house has two rooms: one up, one down. Downstairs are the rabbits, guinea-pigs, rice-pounding equipment and a wonky bed Jean-Didier has built should upstairs be full at Christmas. Up the

steep ladder of whittled eucalyptus, pushing aside the roosting chickens and guinea fowl, feeling their scaly feet battling for space with your own, takes you to the other room: the living/sleeping/cooking/sitting and talking room. The smoke from the fire on the south side, which is burning dry grass, escapes out of one of two windows to the west. Mats on the floor, mud walls, wooden shutters, thatched roof. Two plastic buckets of water - one clean, one dirty, a set of Chinese tin plates, two blackened casseroles.

In this upstairs room Ravao and her husband brought up six children. Now only she and her youngest son remain. Her husband died two years ago, and the other children have all left to find work. The eldest son, Jean-Batiste, works as a carpenter in the far north of the island. He has not been home for years, not even when his father died, for the message took too long to reach him. Four of the three girls are in service: Claire is with one of Radolphe's sons in Antananarivo, Brigitte works in Antsirabe, Claudine keeps moving about and coming home because she is unhappy. Siza used to work for Léonard's ex-wife in Antananarivo, but is now married and living nearby. Jean-Didier is still at school. He failed his first year at secondary school and was made to repeat. Second time around he came second in the class. At prize-giving day he won a Bic biro and an exercise book. His mother cried - two small tears of pride.

Ravao cannot afford to have her daughters at home, which is why they have left, even though they are unmarried. Neither can she really afford Jean-Didier's school fees. She has no land of her own, not even the land on which her house stands. Like all the adults in Tongotrazo she finds work as a day labourer for the landowners of Ambohipo. But she is getting older, her back aches, her hand gets stiff sowing seedlings, she does not work as fast as she once did. When she no longer finds work, Jean-Didier will no longer go to school for there will be no money for the fees. Besides, he will have to earn money to support his mother. He already does - straight after school he takes a sickle and a sack and cuts grass for Rajean-Ba's cows. Then he does

his homework by the last feeble light of dusk, saving the oil in the lamp.

It is difficult for the girls to get married. Working in other people's houses, away from the village, away from their own kind. Siza is married. She met her husband, Mbozaka, in the house where she worked in Antananarivo, although he is only from the next valley. She was the housekeeper and he the gardener. She became pregnant with his child. Their employer made them marry but Mbozaka's family did not give their blessing to the union. Nor were the usual marriage customs observed - the showing of the bridegroom and the giving of the brideprice. Nor will the groom's family allow Siza or any children she bears to be buried in their family tomb, as is the custom with regular marriages. But this is not a regular marriage - because Siza is from Tongotrazo.

Ravao

She had the bones of a bird: small, light and fragile, straining at her tightly wrinkled skin. In stature she came only half way up the doorframe of her tiny mud and thatch house. So the biggest thing about her was her smile, which was as wide as her face, and - despite her sixty years - packed with regular milk-white teeth.

Her clothes: bare feet, a once flowered dress grown grey-brown and ragged at the hem, and on her head, above the smile, always the same thick blue woollen hat, to keep, she said, the cold from her fingers.

Ravao felt her age in her back and in her wrist; she suffered frequently from headaches and would often come to me asking for aspirin. On the days she did not find work, she would cut greens for the rabbits and guinea-pigs fattening up under the stairs, tend her small patch of manioc, and hunt through the scrubby coppiced eucalyptus for fuel, which she carried home on her head. On her back she carried her grandson Toky, whom she cared for on the days that her only nearby daughter Siza found wage labour.

It was on days such as these that Ravao and I got to know each other. I would entertain Toky while she washed clothes; she tried to teach me to pound manioc leaves in tandem, but my incompetence led only to clashing pestles and fits of laughter; she made us boiled manioc and maize which we ate off plastic plates upstairs in the smoky kitchen; we tried to comfort the child when he cried for his mother. A strange pairing of a young man and an elderly lady bound together by his curiosity of mind and her generosity of spirit.

Before I knew Ravao I had always been wary of Tongotrazo, skirting the borders of its manioc fields on the way between Vohitromby and the village, perturbed as much by the shabby poverty of its houses, set apart as they were in calculated estrangement from Ambohipo proper, as by the stigma of low status that lurked in the shadows of local social knowledge and about which I was slowly coming to learn.

It was a topic that was hard to get close to, a subject which existed in the tacit accord of its very avoidance. I sensed this and so dared not ask. However, one day Ramama felt it was time that I knew. We were alone in the kitchen having just paid off a small group of Tongotrazo day labourers.

‘You know those people - they’re not like us.’

I feigned total ignorance: ‘How do you mean?’

Ramama listened for other movement in the house. ‘They are a different kind. They are....’

She paused again. Lowered her voice.

‘.....slaves.’

‘Still?’

‘Yes. No. A long long time ago. But now, you see, they are poor. And black. Their hair is frizzy. Look at Claire’s hair – it’s thick and very frizzy.’ She was right. Claire was Ravao’s daughter. I had seen her dragging a brush through her obstinate tangle, wincing, and gathering it up into bunches. Ramama’s own hair was long, straight, smooth, slightly greying; on Sundays Kaneny oiled the tresses and wove it into fine plaits.

‘We do not marry with them, us clean people. I have always made sure the children don’t get involved with them. You know what Ragry is for the girls, but he wouldn’t dare have a girlfriend from Tongotrazo.’

She looked at me knowingly, watching the lesson sink in. Then finally: ‘You mustn’t talk to them about it. Nothing at all. It makes them too ashamed.’ And she gave me that long, slow look again.

That was the only time we talked about it. That was all there was to say.

Rakotobe

So it was Ravao who took me to meet the other households of Tongotrazo. We started with Rakotobe, elder of the hamlet, brother-in-law of Ravao, and president of the Catholic church in Ambohipo. It was in the latter context that I knew of him, for his incoherent announcements of church business every Sunday after mass. Standing in the aisle at the back, shuffling bashfully from one foot to the other, his mumblings were so muted and impenetrable that the whole congregation would soon resort to checking with each other in whispers what it was they thought Rakotobe had just said, thus obscuring what he was actually saying. But I had never met him in person.

Ravao called up to his house from below. A child appeared on the balcony and then disappeared again to fetch his father. Rakotobe, deep black and bone lean, emerged and beckoned us up the ladder onto the balcony through a trapdoor fastened open with a bent nail. Inside the house there were two rooms separated by a sliver of hallway. In one, Rakotobe’s young wife sat stoking the fire under a large pot of manioc. She turned round on her stool and greeted us.

‘Is it ready yet?’ asked Ravao.

‘Shortly. Have a seat.’ But instead Rakotobe took us into the other room, which was mostly taken up by a lumpy double bed and a tin trunk. The previous year’s calendar from the Productive Peasants’ Bank was fixed to the wall with a nail alongside an image of the

Virgin and Child, she in luminous blue, he blond, pink and haloed like his mother, flailing his chubby arms in the direction of the Lamb of God emerging from a cloud.

‘Ralioka is visiting us,’ said Ravao, ‘he is our kin and is living here with us Betsileo to study our customs and language.’

‘Welcome. Ravao’s kin is our kin. Welcome.’ He nodded and smiled, more eloquent in gesture than in speech. The room was filling up, mostly with children. Barefoot, muddy-kneed, dressed in the indeterminate brown-grey tatters of the rural poor, they wriggled around each other like so much bait in a box. Rakotobe’s sister came in from next door, so did his second son from his first marriage, Michel.

Michel, Rakotobe’s only remaining son in the village, had four children of his own. He had been to lycée, the only person from Tongotrazo to have taken his education so far. But he had got no further, and now he sharecropped the fields of the wealthy Lutherans, having none of his own. At school he had learned English; to show me he once wrote ‘the baby is hungry’ in my notebook, and although he could pronounce the phrase its meaning had become lost to him. More articulate and less reserved than his father, but with the same gentleness, Michel did most of the talking on that visit. He was fascinated by the idea of England: What did we grow there? What was the staple food? Where did we bury our dead? Did we rewrap them?

I had brought with me some postcards of the Welsh Marches, which I passed around. Rakotobe reached for his glasses - heavy black lopsided frames with thick scratched lenses - and squinted at the green uplands dotted with sheep, the ploughed fields, the solid Norman church at Clun, more sheep.

‘Your land is wide and open,’ he observed. ‘Not like here. It’s more like Tsiroanomandidy.’ He had never been there, but he knew about it. Earlier that month, his second son Alexis had taken his wife, their three young children, and a few belongings on the taxi-brousse to Tsiroanomandidy in search of wide open spaces. They didn’t know what to expect, only that there would be land. They didn’t know

exactly where they were headed, only that there were more people from Ambohipo, some from Tongotrazo, settled in a village called Belobaka - or maybe Bilbaka, nobody quite knew. They would ask when they got there. Nobody here had ever been to Tsiroanomandidy, the last town in the highlands, staging post for the empty mid-west that lay behind it. When people talked of Tsiroanomandidy, they meant not the town itself, but the promised land beyond; Belobaka could be one hour from the town - or it could be two days. Alexis and his family had gone looking for it, taking their lives with them. It was almost certain they would never return.

This was in the nature of their migration. The others who had gone to the mid-west had stayed out there; they were rarely mentioned. I sensed a reticence to talk of these lost kin. When I once raised the subject of Alexis' migration with Michel, he grew unusually terse. No, he had not written a letter. His brother had gone, he had stayed. That was that. That was life.

Simon-Piera, Rakoto, Rasamson

My description of these five neighbourhoods of Ambohipo has presented them as discrete quarters within the village. Actually, although each quarter was basically home to a particular kin group, the boundaries between were not clearly defined. The following three people occupied grey areas in the village, but are nevertheless significant in the context of this ethnography.

Simon-Piera

Simon-Piera was one of those people whom I never saw about the village. He never went to church or took much part in village events. I don't recall seeing him in the fields or passing him in the street. As far as I remember, I met him only once, when Kaneny took me to his house.

On that occasion we sat on the mats in his dusky kitchen. I told him about my work and apologised for not having visited sooner. A child played round her father's legs, watching me with big, round

eyes. His wife worked at the loom in the next room. I asked Simon-Piera about his father.

‘A cattle dealer.’

‘Is he still in Ambohipo?’

‘No. In the west.’

I asked about other family. There were two brothers, one a dentist. ‘And the other one?’

‘He farms out west.’

‘Does he have any children?’

‘Still small.’

Conversation on family issues was not flowing, so I tried him on the subject of education. Some success. After primary school in Ambohipo he attended the Collège St Exupéry and the Lycée Gallieni, two of the best schools in Antananarivo. Then he had studied civil engineering at the university of Diego-Suarez where he was taught by ‘Vietnamese socialists.’

Did he like studying?

Quite unexpectedly he answered in French: ‘L’habitude est un [sic] seconde nature.’ This reply, laconic and enigmatic, seemed very much like Simon-Piera himself.

We talked a little more. Then I left Simon-Piera and his wife who smiled up from her loom, and walked home in the dark to Vohitromby beset by a rare feeling of unfulfilment. I had become used to fuller exchange in my visits. Even though, as any anthropologist must, I was imposing myself into people’s lives and homes, I was usually flattered by their generous reciprocated interest in myself and my world. Indeed, we often spent more time talking about Britain, its people and especially its agriculture and burial customs, than we did about Madagascar. This was useful to me on two levels: firstly because one’s informants’ questions often reveal more about them than one’s own; secondly because the real point of my visits was not to gather information but to establish relationships, communication and trust. With Simon-Piera I felt I had achieved nothing. But then he

owed me nothing and was entitled, I reasoned, to stew in his own lassitude and terseness. Maybe it was just a bad day.

At home in the kitchen Rasoa was cooking the rice, stoking the fire with thin twigs that flared up, glowed red and turned immediately to ash. Rajean-Ba was chewing tobacco. As usual they asked me who I had been to see that day. I told them.

‘Did he say much?’ asked Rajean-Ba through his tobacco.

‘Not much.’

They both laughed. I told them the little I had learned of Simon-Piera’s family, his father the cattle dealer and his two brothers. I said I felt there was more to know about Simon-Piera. Rasoa, who loved the chance to talk about others, grasped the opportunity.

The story started with Rapiera, a wealthy cattle baron who had spent his life trading between the mid-west and the Betsileo highlands. Whilst married to his first wife, with whom he had two sons, Rapiera had fathered a third boy, Simon-Piera, by another woman, Ralida. Shortly after this the wife died in childbirth, said to have been poisoned by Ralida, who soon came to live with Rapiera, although the couple observed none of the normal marriage ceremonies. Rapiera went back to the west where he found more wives and fathered more children. But he treated his three sons equally and, as a rich man, gave them the best possible education: the Collège de St Exupéry and the Lycée Gallieni were two of the best schools in Antananarivo. But one holiday in Ambohipo, during his university years, Simon-Piera got a village girl pregnant. Her parents made him marry her and stay in the village; he never completed his studies. Inept at agriculture, Simon-Piera was fetched by his father to the mid-west where he set him up with a shop. But he only drank and gambled away the profits. His father sent him home again to Ambohipo where listlessly he farmed the family land. He had more children.

‘He was spoilt,’ said Rasoa. ‘He has not succeeded in life. That is why he doesn’t say much. He’s like that with everybody.’

Rakoto

Life had left Rakoto with few choices. I don't know whether his father had left or died or both, only that his mother had brought up her eight children in a house belonging to her sister-in-law at Ambohimandriana, one small valley to the south. There Rakoto and his siblings had grown up in obscure poverty until one day the sister-in-law sold the house and land at a knock-down price to a local schoolteacher who then left it for many months standing empty. I was told, not by Rakoto - he would not speak ill of his family - that his aunt had squandered the money on meat and drink until, penniless again, she spent her days begging in Fandriana. I would often see her there at the roadside, her child playing listlessly in the dust outside the gendarmerie, and I would drop a few coins into her upturned hat.

The sale of the house had left Rakoto's family homeless. His mother went to live nearby with a daughter and her husband, and the husband's ten brothers, and their widowed mother, and various sisters-in-law and their children. There was not really room for Rakoto, who then aged sixteen, followed an older brother to find work in Antananarivo. He had no skills, no experience, no idea what to expect.

He found work with a Pakistani wholesaler carrying sacks of flour all day. In the evenings he made fried buns which he sold from a street stall. He slept in the back of his boss's lorry to guard the merchandise. He got by.

Rakoto had a sister who had left home the previous year to seek work in the city. He did not know where she was, but had heard that she was with a Merina man and had a child. He went looking for her. When he found her there was a child but no man; she was living in a shelter run by French nuns for single homeless mothers. Rakoto saved enough money for the fare home and took himself, his sister and the child back to Sahamadio to the overcrowded house. He never returned to Antananarivo.

Unable to live with his mother and sisters, Rakoto came to live with us as our cowherd. At eighteen, he was really too old for such work, for this was boys' work and carried boys' wages - 3000 *ariary* a

month paid directly to his mother. He had no money, no land, no house; he had a boy's job, a mother and sister and her child to support, and no possessions beyond a pair of shorts and a ragged purple vest.

We became friends. I liked his modest and genuine manner. Without being optimistic, Rakoto nevertheless lived cheerfully in the present, despite its difficulties. When he smiled it took up his whole face. And in his impeccable manners he showed deference and respect to his elders, carrying out orders cheerfully. Sometimes we would take the cows out together, spending sunny mornings chewing grass-stems, learning of each other's worlds as we threw stones to steer the cows from forbidden crops. He had a good ear for language and loved to learn English. He remembered with ease the vocabulary I taught him: chicken, manure, basket, spade, cart. Moreover, he spoke to me in clear and thoughtful Malagasy, for he had the intelligence and discernment to consider how his words and syntax would sound to my ears. I wondered what he did with his thoughts on those long, cow-minding days by himself.

He started going to church. A new church had been built at Ambohimandriana, run by a Protestant evangelical mission in Antananarivo, backed by US baptists. Rakoto went in his new best clothes: an old green shirt of mine with a collar, white trainers with no laces because they pinched, corduroy trousers bought with pocket money earned terracing the bank for Raso'a's vegetable garden in the very early mornings. He went to bible classes but had no bible.

Before I left Ambohipo I talked with Raso'a about buying Rakoto some land - enough to build a house upon, to bring a wife home to. I knew, of course, that he would immediately fill it up with needy relatives, but it would be better than being somebody's cowherd. There was even the possibility of buying back the aunt's old place. Rakoto said the new owners were not comfortable there, being unsettled by bangings in the night. 'It's my [deceased] grandfather,' he explained with the trace of a smile, 'he is unhappy that his house has been sold. He wants us to live there again.'

But the people of Ambohimandriana did not. Raso'a's discreet enquiries revealed that 'those kind of people' were unwelcome. She told this to me, but not to Rakoto, for it was a reference to his slave descent. She simply told him it was not for sale. Maybe he suspected, or guessed, or knew: he had come up against such invisible, unspoken barriers all his life; he would continue to do so.

However, before I returned to England a small plot appeared for sale near Rakoto's mother. I told him I would give him the money to buy it and for days he practised his signature on scrap paper ready for signing the deeds. He bought two litres of rum to celebrate and seal the deal, which I, as the anonymous benefactor could not attend, and came home one evening, slightly tipsy, a man of property. In the weeks that followed he spent all his spare time building a house on the land, into which, just as I had thought, he immediately installed several needy relatives.

Rasamson

It was dusk on Saturday evening, the time known as *maizim-bava vilany* - when the mouth of the cooking-pot is dark. It seemed a strange time to be going to visit the president of the village about my proposed stay in Ambohipo.

From outside we announced our arrival, but there was no reply so we climbed the steep stairs leading up through a hatch onto the balcony. There was the scent of a newly-lit fire, and the sound of movement within. Ragisely greeted us in the gloom, and as we were on official business, showed us into the north room before returning to her hearth. Rasamson came in, crouched and frail but quick and busy in his movements, greeting us with a formal two-handed handshake, his arms and fingers hard and thin. 'Entrez, entrez, asseyez-vous.'

Rajeana-Ba explained with apparent lack of ceremony the reason, or rather it seemed, the fact of my stay, and I held out my official letter from the University of Antananarivo. From the sideboard the president fetched an untidy batch of official papers, and on a page

torn from an exercise book he started to copy my letter, word for word.

As the light was poor he took his bundle to the windowsill and leant there copying, occasionally asking for clarification of a word:

‘What is archaeology?’

‘Some kind of knowledge,’ said Rajean-Ba.

‘Oh, that’s good.’

Soon it was too dark even on the windowsill, so Rasamson called to his wife for a candle, which she brought and placed for him, but not to his liking, so he grumbled and there followed one of those terse but unmalicious exchanges common to couples of long standing.

‘No, not there, here of course.’

‘But the wind.’

‘Yes, then close the shutter.’

He settled down again, the candle on the arm of the chair, kneeling close to his papers like a schoolboy over his homework, copying at length every phrase, every precious printed stamped and authorised phrase. These he took possession of to be kept with the other affairs of state - the records of village livestock, the postal receipts, the tax forms and death certificates - in his tattered sheaf in the sideboard.

As he wrote I looked round the room. It was sparse and unused: just two upright armchairs upholstered in red plastic, a dark wooden sideboard, no ornaments or pictures. Rasamson’s eyes were tiring, so Rajean-Ba offered to read the letter out loud. This hastened matters, particularly as he skipped the last paragraph. It did not matter: the paper had been dealt with and human affairs could resume. We thanked the president for his assistance, and with a blessing on my work he sent us home through the night.

Thematic and theoretical orientation of the thesis

This introductory description of Ambohipo was written shortly after I left the village following eighteen months fieldwork. It describes Ambohipo as I knew it, and although some things have surely

changed, there is undoubtedly much that has not. I know that Michel has left his family in Tongotrazo to take a chance with thousands of others digging for sapphires in the north. I am quite sure that Rose is still selling rum on the steps of the hospital. But it is Ambohipo as I knew it from 1997-1999 that forms the basis of this ethnographic thesis.

At this early stage I have preferred to describe rather than explain. The analysis will come later as the thesis develops into a more prosaic discussion of education, knowledge and social differentiation. But the starting point of any ethnography has to be the idiosyncratic and initially puzzling minutiae of local life which anthropology connects to more universal issues. So this introduction is not simply a collection of illustrative details to give the reader a 'feel' for the village. It is the very basis of this thesis. Potato cakes, bundles of rice seedlings, logging concessions, school certificates, jerrycans of rum are not incidental background decoration. They are the stuff of people's lives and as such central to a social analysis of Ambohipo. So are the colour of the earth, the look of the landscape, the location of the primary school, the fact of two churches, the orientation of the houses, the plastic sheet over the ancestors, the length of a woman's hair. The significance of these details may not be clear to the reader at this point. But by the end of this thesis I hope it will be.

This thesis is subjective and selective, as any ethnography must be. But one strength of long-term fieldwork is that it irons out the prejudices and preferences (both personal and intellectual) of the fieldworker, replacing them with 'the natives' point(s) of view', which I hope I have represented in this thesis. Although the people of Ambohipo would never analyse their village in the way I have, I nevertheless believe the main themes of this thesis reflect the inherent nature of the place: social differentiation, education and knowledge were central issues in people's lives, although not necessarily local categories. Other anthropologists would have researched and written about the village in a different manner, but I think they would have tussled with the same themes as I have.

The data on which this thesis is founded is of course the result of my own fieldwork style. I found the residents of Ambohipo to be more at ease with general discussion than formal questioning, whereas city dwellers whom I met seemed to expect structured interviews. So most of the time I was happy swanning around the village, doing what has been aptly described as ‘deep hanging-out’. I usually found that if there was something I did not understand it was because it was about to become clear to me shortly. So rather than ask directly, which the Betsileo tended to avoid, I just waited and the answer soon found me. For example, the subject of slavery was never raised by the descendants of slaves themselves, so I never discussed it with them. I consider my understanding of their position to be deeper for this rather than shallower, for empathy is often a better research tool than enquiry. It is unnecessary, alienating and arrogant to probe delicate subjects in the name of anthropological analysis. I am reluctant even to write about slave status. Yet that subject matter is crucial to this analysis. My only excuse is a poor one: that my friends will never read it themselves.

Some of my fieldwork *modus operandi* will have been discernible in the preceding descriptions and mini-biographies of individual characters. They are not necessarily people who feature strongly in the thesis; some were close friends, others I hardly knew. They are here because they represent the social spectrum of Ambohipo. All too often individuals are omitted from anthropological analysis in favour of a generalised composite native character which eliminates individual differences and effaces social diversity. I cannot let this happen here, for difference and diversity are the basis of this thesis.

This thesis examines the role of formal education in creating the differentiated society introduced in the first part of this chapter. It also shows the ritual elaboration of this differentiation, and its role in the Betsileo social construction of knowledge. In Chapter Two I give some historical background to the major themes of the thesis. Using a mixture of Malagasy oral narratives and European historical accounts I

reconstruct important elements of the region's, the valley's and the village's past, from the early settlement, through colonisation by the Merina and the French, to the post-colonial present of the Third Republic. In telling this story I emphasise the importance to the region's development of contact with outside forces such as the national government, the Church and of course the school. This is a major theme of the thesis.

Continuing the theme of the world beyond the valley, Chapter Three examines patterns of Betsileo migration in the context of other ethnographic analyses of this important Malagasy phenomenon. Focusing on the social and spiritual dimensions of migration I show how education has created a new pattern of migration in the valley of Sahamadio. The relationship of *ampielezana* (educated urban migrants - see glossary) to their ancestral village is contrasted with that of agricultural migrants. I discuss various meanings of the notion of the 'land of the ancestors'.

Chapter Four describes the factors responsible for the extreme socio-economic differentiation characteristic of Ambohipo. I show how those families best able to gain access to external sources of power and influence have prospered economically. The school is the most important of these. I demonstrate how rather than democratising socio-economic opportunity in the village the school has mainly favoured wealthier families.

In Chapter Five I discuss the effect of the economic prosperity of *ampielezana* on the ritual economy of the village. I demonstrate the role of tombs, tomb building and tomb ceremonies in social and ritual differentiation. I demonstrate the importance to ritual potency in the valley of wealth acquired outside it, particularly through education. I show the contradiction between the inclusive rhetoric used around tombs and the social fissure, jealousy and segmentation represented in their construction.

Chapter Six analyses the acquisition and transmission of the practical knowledge regarded as the basis of social interaction and correct conduct by the Betsileo. I demonstrate the moral value placed

on this knowledge as something only available through living in the moral environment of the *tanindrazana* (land of the ancestors - see glossary). I demonstrate the importance of the valley's distinctive landscape to a local social memory of an ancestral golden age.

Chapter Seven continues the theme of a Betsileo social construction of knowledge, focusing on the learning environment of the classroom. Following a brief ideological history of the Malagasy school, I indicate the legacies of colonial pedagogy existing in post-colonial school practice. I show how the Betsileo's encounter with the missionaries and French colonial government created a particular socially constituted perception of school knowledge. Then I demonstrate the historical and contemporary importance of school knowledge in creating social differentiation, and present the local idioms used to discuss this.

The final chapter discusses the social constitution of the land of the ancestors (*tanindrazana*) and of ancestral knowledge. I demonstrate how the Betsileo's experience of the modern institution of the school has informed their view of 'traditional' Betsileo practice and knowledge. I show that while education may be seen by the Betsileo to threaten 'tradition' it is also instrumental in its creation and maintenance.

Chapter Two

Reconstructing the past

In the days and months not remembered by the pen there was born at Ambohipo (the hilltop up to the east) a beautiful plump little boy. For many years his mother and father had longed for him. The sun was high in the sky. The wind blew hard, rattling the shutters. Although darkness was yet far off, still the owl screeched and the wild cat wailed. Father and mother shook with fear and sent for Tsimivily the famous diviner.

So begins the story of Randriamahalefitra, the first named ancestor of many of the residents of modern-day Ambohipo. Nine generations after his birth, when I came to live in the village, there were few of his descendants who knew his story in the detail that I can now present it to the reader. The reason is simple: although the story was essentially an oral narrative - what the Malagasy call *lovan-tsofina* ('the inheritance of the ears') - it had recently been committed to another, less traditional medium. It had been written down.

Asking around the village for the story of Randriamahalefitra, of the Twelve Men and of the founding of Ambohipo I was repeatedly directed towards the mayor, who was said to have the story written in a book which he kept in his house. One day when I went to visit him, he agreed to tell me the story but clammed up and changed the subject when I asked about the book. Access to the ancestral story, I found, was controlled and restricted.

I did not force the issue, but took it in my stride as one of the minor disappointments that characterise anthropological fieldwork. These are often counterbalanced by unexpected pieces good fortune. A few days later, Ravaoanjely, the oldest woman in Ambohipo and an aunt to both myself and the mayor, shuffled up to me after church and quietly, with great circumspection, handed me a rather scruffy exercise book. She said it might be of interest to my research, that I could

borrow it, but that I must be careful not to lose it. And then she blessed me and walked away home, her starched Sunday *lamba* shining white in the midday sun.

In the book, in neat schoolboy script, I found a detailed account of the lives of the ancestors of Ambohipo from Randriamahalefitra to just before the arrival of the Norwegian missionaries. It may seem strange, indeed ironic, that what had started as ‘the inheritance of the ears’ had become the inheritance of the pen. But actually there is a long history of this practice, ever since the arrival of writing in the island (Rajaonarimanana 1986; Graeber 1996:ch.6; Bloch 1998a). In owning the book the mayor also ‘owned’ the history. This gave him control of which ancestral stories, about which ancestors, he gave to which people. He converted narratives into power (Steadly 1993:176), and other villagers conceded it to him: ‘Don’t ask me about village history,’ they would say, ‘go and see the mayor - he has a book.’

But the mayor’s story was only one story. His was the story of Randriamahalefitra, the baby born on the hilltop, ancestor of the local descent group known as the Twelve Men. The other descent group in Ambohipo, with whom the Twelve Men have exchanged wives over many generations, is called Andriamilanja after an early ancestor of their own. They too have an ancestral history, a version of which was recounted to me in detail by Radolphe one morning in his smoky kitchen. He spoke in a low, quiet mumble as the parrot squawked on its perch, the ducks splashed and quacked in the yard and his seven-year-old grandson interjected periodically in a high-pitched squeak. All these sounds were captured by my microphone, but it was the story of Andriamilanja which, for the first time in its telling, became destined for transcription: first to my fieldnotes, then to this thesis and so to a new life outside of the valley of Sahamadio. Pondering this fact, Radolphe finished his story with the following ambiguous observation: ‘Stories such as this have never really been written down on paper but have always been passed on as word of mouth. It is perhaps better for it to stay this way. On the other hand, we feel that it

is also good that the stories of these ancestors should be written down so as to be known in future by their descendants.’

This was a strange situation for Radolphe. It is possible that he had never told the story at length, in full. Perhaps it had only previously existed as a series of connected anecdotes. But the two young men who asked him to tell the story - myself, his adopted foreign son, and Théo, his own youngest son home from university and helping me as a research assistant - were of a different generation with different ways of remembering and looser connections to the valley. There was a resigned pragmatism to Radolphe’s observations: if the story of Andriamilanja had to be written down in order to preserve it, then so be it. He had spent his life facing such dilemmas.

Radolphe resisted the transcription of his ancestral story because he felt it to be a departure from ancestral ways: the inheritance of the ears should remain just that. But he also recognised that times had changed and transcription might be for the best. People felt the same about education: it taught useful skills and could bring prosperity, but at the same time it seemed contradictory to ancestral precedents. It is in this context that knowledge was such an issue for the northern Betsileo. So this was the dilemma of change in Ambohipo: the opportunities and imperatives of innovation sometimes sat uncomfortably with the prescriptions and proscriptions of tradition. This is not my own abstracted dichotomy, but a reflection of the way people talked about the pragmatics of a cultural life which involved a constant negotiation between the past and the present. How people attempted to reconcile these sometimes contrary forces while creating a future for themselves and their offspring is one of the bases of this ethnography of Ambohipo.

That recorded history of the Andriamilanja descent group and the written history of the Twelve Men are the main ‘oral’ sources for my history of Sahamadio. They are supplemented by other fragments of the past collected during fieldwork in the valley, and by the synthesis of local oral histories which form the basis of Ratsimbazafimahefa’s (1971) study of the settlement and early social

history of Fisakana. For wider knowledge of the area's history, less specific to Ambohipo and Sahamadio but pertaining generally to the northern region of the Betsileo, I have referred to published sources such as Dubois (1938), Deschamps (1972), Fuglestad and Simensen (1986) and Raison-Jourde (1991). Finally I have drawn heavily upon the *Monographie du District de Fandriana*, a formal colonial account of the geographic, social, cultural, political and historic terrain as viewed and controlled by the *Administrateur Adjoint des Colonies*, *Chef du District*, Pierre Varaine. Written in 1949, partly by the Chef himself and partly, it would seem, by his Malagasy staff, the *Monographie* provides an intriguing counterpart to the local perspectives of the ancestral histories of the Twelve Men and Andriamilanja. Unlike the ancestral histories, which were destined for a local audience, the *Monographie* was expressly created for an external readership wanting to know about the region and - it would seem - how best to rule it. Moreover, some of Varaine's material is very scientific in nature, presenting dates, statistics, facts and figures which contrast with the more atmospheric biographical accounts of local tradition which I have collected in Ambohipo. Yet in places, although he does not acknowledge it, Varaine has clearly been obliged to draw on local narratives for his historical evidence, to the end that his objective written colonial account is partly constituted from indigenous oral narratives that are, in their nature, partial and subjective (for example, the story of Rarivoekembahoaka, see below). Thus the colonial and local perspectives intertwine and feed off each other, and the distinction between them blurs. A particular narrative may have more than one source: children in Ambohipo could learn of the days of ancestral hilltop settlements both at school and at home, from their schoolmaster and from their grandfather. What I call an oral narrative may well have been informed by the school curriculum, itself perhaps informed by colonial accounts such as Varaine's, which in turn were informed by pre-colonial oral narratives. The extent to which narratives are mutually constitutive can never be fully defined, but that need not delay us here. The point to be aware of in the reading

of the accounts I use is that although the accounts do perhaps feed off each other, each one carries and promotes its own political perspective, bias, omissions and inaccuracies, intended or otherwise. I cannot indicate all of these to the reader, but simply make the obvious point that - as with any account, including this ethnography - we should read as much between the lines as along them.

Thus I have compiled a jigsaw of local histories: part colonial account, part oral narrative, part missionary record. The sum of all these parts does not constitute a whole, for the 'history' you read below is far from complete. For example, the histories of slaves and women are muted in comparison to those of free men. Indeed many of the jigsaw's pieces do not even seem to belong to the same puzzle: while the European sources are concerned with dates and chronology, the oral narratives are more biographical in nature, concerned with people rather than timescale. But my aim here is not to present a definitive and seamless history of Sahamadio, rather it is to elicit from these various accounts of the valley's past those themes that resonate with the major issues of this thesis. Among these are the importance of migration in the social history of the northern Betsileo; their relationship with central government; the European foundation of schooling, as introduced by Norwegian missionaries and developed under French colonialism; and the economic advantage to be gained through connections with external sources of wealth and influence, particularly by means of formal education. With these themes in mind, the best place to start is in the early years when the valley was first settled, in those days and months not remembered by the pen.

The early settlement of Sahamadio

The valley of Sahamadio, where Ambohipo is situated, runs north to south to join the river known as the Fisakana, which gives its name to the region around Fandriana. The river changes its name several times over its course. Swelled by its affluent the Fitamaria in the north-east forest fringes of the region, the Fisakana becomes the Imalaza at

Miadanimerina where it winds through a broad flood plain planted with ricefields before becoming the Mania at Soanimpandalo.

Although named after the river which runs through it, the region of Fisakana extends far beyond its banks. It can be divided into three zones: the humid eastern zone bordering the forest of Betsimisotra is characterised by narrow steeply-terraced valleys; the central zone features the broad rice plains of Fandriana, Sahamadio and Mangoro, the main areas of rural population in the region; finally, to the west extend the upland pastures which form the characteristic topography of much of the high plateau. The history of the settlement of Fisakana is largely a story of east-west migration through these zones, although this broad movement has been supplemented by small-scale migrations, mainly consisting of political dissenters and refugees from areas to the north, west and south of Fisakana. This will be discussed at greater length.

The upper reaches of the river have historically been seen as constituting the border between Imerina to the north and the four Betsileo kingdoms of Manandriana, Lalangina, Isandra and Arindrano to the south. This was certainly the perspective of Merina sovereigns travelling through the highlands in the eighteenth century (Dubois 1938:16). For many centuries, it would seem, this distinction stood, since the valley of the Mania, along with the neighbouring Andrantsay and Manandona, remained unoccupied and thus constituted a no-man's land between the Merina and the Betsileo. By the time the first settlers arrived in the Mania valley in the early eighteenth century (Dubois 1938:16; Raison-Jourde 1991:407), the Betsileo kingdoms to the south were already established polities undergoing rapid population growth, raising organised armies and trading with Europeans and Arabs (Deschamps 1972:112). The kingdom of Imerina was similarly advanced and settled. The Fisakana region, in contrast, was - with the exception of the small kingdom of Ambohipoalina - an almost unpopulated wilderness between the Merina and the Betsileo. According to Varaine, the only inhabitants were *vazimba* (people of unknown origin and ancestry) who had settled there having fled the

arrival of the Merina in the central highlands. The presence of these early settlers is witnessed in a standing stone near Miadanimerina and in the burial site of the *vazimba* chief Andrimasitsaotra on a hilltop north of Fandriana (Varaine 1949:12).

The fact that Fisakana was only sparsely settled until the late eighteenth century partially explains why it has been disregarded by historians. But there is still very little historical analysis of the time after it was settled, and I attribute this to the liminal status of Fisakana as neither Imerina nor Betsileo. For example, Dubois, the foremost ethnographer of the Betsileo, discounts Fisakana as not ‘proper’ Betsileo (1938:16). But neither is it truly Imerina: although Fisakana later came under the direct rule of the Merina empire, the population was designated ethnically Betsileo by the Merina. Indeed, the ethnonym was a Merina imperial invention used originally to denote the ‘many unconquered peoples’ of the southern highlands. It was not until Fisakana became an area of missionary activity, and then later a colonially administered department, that it attracted written historical attention. The historical record prior to this is an oral one, such as is contained in the ‘inheritance of the ears’ that I gathered in Sahamadio. As we shall see, these oral narratives remember back to the days when the valley was first settled. From then on settlement was rapid, and by the middle of the twentieth century Fisakana had become one of the most populated regions of Madagascar (Varaine 1949:7). Deschamps (1959:108) records a population density of 80 people per square kilometre in the area around Fandriana. By 1972, it had risen to more than 100 people per square kilometre of usable land (Raison 1984(2):380). This is nearly twice the average for the northern Betsileo region, itself one of the most crowded areas of the island. This population density is, of course, a major factor in migration. The relationship between migration and education is a major theme of this thesis, and is dealt with in detail in Chapter Three.

The early settlers of the Fisakana region were probably migrants coming up the forest escarpment to the east (Dubois 1938:97; Deschamps 1972:111). Amongst these were the founders of the

kingdom centred around Ambohipoalina on the western fringes of the Betsimisotra forest. The ability to found a kingdom, the political organisation and the maintenance of a standing army suggest that Ambohipoalina's origins lie in the arabised population of the south east coast. Ancestral genealogies support this thesis, as does evidence of arabised medicinal and divinatory knowledge (Dubois 1938:133; Deschamps 1959:100). Living on the edge of the forest and close to the river, the early population of Ambohipoalina survived on hunting, gathering and fishing. Although originally limited to a small area of the eastern zone of Fisakana, the kingdom spread its descendants into the plains and uplands to the west as the sons and grandsons of the founding king Rafovato established their own fiefdoms (Ratsimbazafimahefa 1971:65,71). Ambohipoalina is therefore seminal in the history of the region. Ratsimbazafimahefa (1971: 29) describes it as the cradle and ancestral source of the population of Fisakana, the equivalent of Ambohimanga to the Merina. This early population was later supplemented by exiles from the powerful Merina and Betsileo kingdoms to the north and south respectively. According to Dubois, this period of migration and settlement was characterised by the splitting up of clans and families, as some moved off in search of new land and others remained behind. He paints a picture of small itinerant bands seeking hilltops to shelter from their enemies, gradually dispersing westwards over the highlands like a wave slowly rolling towards the Mozambique Channel. 'The legends are still all in agreement on this point,' he says, 'and it is intriguing to follow the peregrinations of these new groups running from mountain to mountain, from valley to valley, before fixing upon the place that seems most suitable to them' (1938:100).

Settling on a suitable place was not always straightforward. It usually entailed the permission of and submission to the local chief, as in this story told to me by Rageorges Walter, an elder of Ambohipo. The story had been told to Rageorges as 'the inheritance of the ears' by his grandfather in the 1940s; he had copied it into an exercise book, but recounted it to me without reference to this.

Raimitombo and his wife were a rich couple who came up from the south-east. They arrived at Tsiankarandambo, but the chief would not let them settle there. They looked for another place and arrived at the hilltop of Vohitsoa, to the north-east of Tsiankarandambo. They lit a fire there which was spotted by another local chief who sent his soldiers to investigate. The soldiers asked: 'What are you doing on our land?' They were permitted to stay on condition that they obeyed the local taboos: no eating hedgehogs and no fishing with nets; they had to give the rump of any cattle killed to the chief.

In another, strikingly similar, account of Raimitombo's arrival (Ratsimbazafimahefa 1971:51-2) Raimitombo has been expelled from the kingdom of Manandriana for refusing to cede the rump of his cattle to his chief. The local chief who permits him to stay at Vohitsoa is the king of Ambohipoalina. This was the period referred to as the *maroandriana* (many chiefs), a period characterised by constant warring between rival clans living in fortified hilltop villages. The population of Fisakana at that time was, according to Dubois, mixed and irregular, with some areas almost totally deserted (1938:139). Dissidents and refugees were arriving in Fisakana from all quarters. It was every village for itself. The warring took the form of dry season raids taking villages by surprise, killing the defenders and taking their women, children and cattle. Enslavement was common. Villages were therefore sited on hilltops, often at the top of steep cliffs, protected by a series of concentric ditches planted with spiny shrubs and accessed only by a single sinuous path leading to the stone ramparts around the living quarters (Deschamps 1972:147-8; Varaine 1949:9). This unstable political climate left the valleys uninhabited. Permanent valley settlements were uncommon. Rather, temporary shelters were maintained for agricultural purposes. Fandriana is said to be so named (the name means 'sleeping place') because it was originally used as a site where people spent the night when down in the valley catching fish or growing rice to take back up to the hilltop fort at Kirioka.

The move from the hilltops

I asked Radolphe when it was that the people came down from the hilltop village of Vohitsoa. He did not give a date, but said that when the fighting and raiding began to die down, the people became acquainted with agriculture and shifted little by little to dwell in the valley bottom. He told me the story of his ancestor Andriamarovala, the originator of rice cultivation in Sahamadio:

At that time the valley of Sahamadio was all virgin forest and cattle pasture. Cattle were wealth in those days for they were plentiful then. But Andriamarovala decided to go into rice cultivation. He grew rice. He filled in all the low-lying places and grew rice. He made all the people work for him and harvested lots of rice. When the harvest was in then he was owner of all the rice. When the time came for sowing, the people had no seed because Andriamarovala had it all; so when they decided to grow rice they got their seed from him. They say that is why they name of this wise ancestor is Andriamarovala ('the lord of many ox-ditches'): for the rice which he shared amongst them he took cattle in exchange.

Radolphe told me this story with a certain amount of pride in his ancestor's business acumen, a shrewdness which his own son Léonard has certainly inherited (see Chapter Four). But things did not all go Andriamarovala's way.

Andriamarovala was among the richest men of the district of Sahamadio-Fisakana. At that time there was a way for those rich men to get elevated to the status of *andriana* (the highest caste). In order to do this it was necessary to have one hundred of every kind of livestock. So Andriamarovala went with all his possessions up to Fandriana to have them counted: he took one hundred cattle, one hundred pigs, one hundred ducks, one hundred chickens and one hundred geese. However, on the way to be judged one goose went astray. When he arrived at the court the judge saw that he had one hundred of

everything except geese. That is why there is the saying still remembered by the elders even today: 'It was only because of that one day that Andriamarovala didn't become *andriana*' - because one goose was lost.

And that is the story of Andriamarovala, the wise elder and founder of agriculture in the district of Sahamadio.

The story of Randriamahalefitra, the chubby boy born on the hilltop, also gives an account of the early days of rice cultivation and movement into the valley of Sahamadio. As we saw above, the day of his birth had been characterised by inauspicious weather, and the diviner Tsimivily had been summoned. Tsimivily gave his judgement:

'The little boy is ill-fated, for he was born on a strong day - a red day - and he will bring harm upon his parents. If he is not killed then you will both surely die.' On hearing this, the mother sobbed and wept and the father trembled with sadness. 'You must place him,' said Tsimivily, 'at the gate to the ox ditch where the cattle will walk over him. If he is still alive when all the cattle have passed out, then you may raise him, but if he dies then that is his fate and you must not shed a single tear over it.'

In the morning the tearful mother put her beloved child in the gateway where the fifty cattle would walk out. 'May God and the ancestors bless you, child,' she said, kissing him with tenderness. The child lay there for about fifteen minutes. Perhaps it is the case that animals sometimes respect people, even those abandoned by those who brought them into the world. By the time the cattle had passed out the child was covered in mud and numb with cold, yet there was still a breath of life. The mother gleefully snatched up her dear child; she did not wait to bath him but licked him clean from head to toe covered in mud as he was. And she gave him the name Ndriatsiandro, as the diviner instructed her.

He was raised by his parents with close attention and loving hearts. When he was two they had another son, born on a good day, who they called Randriandamborodona. And the two boys grew up together.

When Ndriatsiandro was twenty years old his father suddenly fell ill. His father had not recovered before his mother fell ill too. Tsimivily was summoned once more to divine the reason. The blame fell on Ndriatsiandro again. 'If he inherits your property now,' said Tsimivily to the parents, 'then you will surely die soon.'

Ndriatsiandro's heart missed a beat. 'Goodbye father, be blessed mother' he said. 'Get healthy again, both of you. I won't make a long speech, only to say that I prefer a hundred times - a thousand times - to be poor and to have you than to be rich and be an orphan. So let's not shed any tears for it is pre-ordained from on high. Send me out to struggle in the world. I can put up with poverty for it is in so doing that I make you live.'

Then Ndriatsiandro's parents blessed him: 'May God and the ancestors protect you in this exile. May you have many descendants, may you have great wealth. From now on you will no longer be called Ndriatsiandro, but Randriamahalefitra ('the exiled one').' They called him this because he was sent out alone from his land. Then the family split up having killed a sheep for food.

So Randriamahalefitra set off to the west without even a dog or a wild pig for company, without firewood or dry rice to his name. He went wherever fate took him in this world of tears, buffeted by the waves of life on this sea of suffering, and he came down to Milamaina near Antoko. He rested a while at Antoko and looked around him. He saw the thick forest around him and the marshy valley bottom before him where wild ducks and coots were swimming in the pools and herons and swallows were playing. And he was greatly cast down at the thought of the inheritance that he had left behind.

Nevertheless he was happy, for leaving his inheritance had saved the lives of his father and mother. Sustained by their love he gained new life and strength. He went on his way and came to near the water in the valley bottom. Realising it would be productive, he made a simple house there and settled in it.

For days and nights he went without, hunting and growing just enough to live. However much he grew poor and suffered he was not disheartened, for he was protected by God in everything he did. He brought in a few sweet

potatoes and arum roots, the rice and the beans were harvested and little by little he had enough to live. He took a girl from nearby Antokolava for his wife. He visited his parents often and brought them gifts. When his brother Randriandamborodona saw the sweet potatoes as big as his head and the manioc as big as his thigh which Randriamahalefitra brought for his parents, he felt a great wish to do the same and went off and took some barren land down to the west where he founded Ambalamanga. The two brothers loved each other, visiting one another almost every week and going together to visit those who had brought them into the world every year, especially at the time of the ritual of the bath.

Contrary to these two accounts collected in Ambohipo, most European written historical accounts (e.g. Dubois 1938:75) attribute this descent from the hilltops to the pacification of the region under the Merina conquest. Although accelerated by Merina rule, movement towards settlement in the valleys was probably already underway at the time: shrinking forest cover combined with a growing population obliged the people to adapt to new means of livelihood. The oral narratives relate how Andriamarovala himself founded a hamlet surrounded by an ox ditch on the valley side, as did Randriamahalefitra and his brother Randriandamborodona. These three ancestors all predate the Merina conquest. Their new settlements were ideally situated for rice cultivation: close enough to bring manure from the ox ditch to the ricefields, but far enough to avoid the unhealthy atmosphere of the swamp. Such hamlets proliferated and the agricultural expansion led to a growth in population across the whole Betsileo region (Dubois 1938: 75, 230). The story of Andriamarovala demonstrates this for Sahamadio.

Antokolava was a village surrounded by a series of ditches which was situated close to the edge of the valley of Sahamadio. Once the ditches had been dug, the descendants of Andriamarovala multiplied. When they became numerous they did not stop there but continued to grow rice and

spread over the valley side close to the ricefields. The descendants began to found new hamlets nearby, following the example of Antokolava.

The Merina conquest

Whether the move from the hilltops was occasioned by Merina rule or by a pre-existing search for new land, the Merina conquest and the centralised government it enforced no doubt accelerated this transition. As peace took hold in the region, the provisional seasonal habitations in the valley bottom became permanent settlements, and slowly superseded the ancestral sites (Ratsimbazafimahefa 1971:23).

The pattern of the Merina conquest depended upon the attitude of the ruling chieftain at the time. Those who assented to Merina rule were left to govern their own territory under the intermittent control of the Merina monarch's deputies, who extracted a small levy of goods from the chief and his people. Those who refused to submit were subjected to the might of the Merina army (Dubois 1938:123-4).

At the time of Merina expansion, the area around Fandriana was ruled by Rarivoekembahoaka. The kingdom of Ambohipoalina had cast its descendants westward, and from his hilltop palace at Kirioka this grandson of Rafovato had established sovereignty over central Fisakana. Among his subjects were noble Merina who had fled the growing dominion of Andrianampoinimerina to the north, as well as Betsileo migrants from the south. Both groups had asked Rarivoekembahoaka's permission to settle under his protection. The kingdom was administered by twenty parochial minister-judges (*manambohinahitra*). Andriamarovala - he of the lost goose - acted as the *manambohinahitra* of Antokolava, Sahamadio.

This local rule ended, however, when the army of Andrianampoinimerina reached Fisakana. Having conquered Andriamanalina, king of the Andrantsay eighty miles to the northwest, the Merina king sent an envoy to Rarivoekembahoaka urging him to 'declare himself the king's child'. Sources differ as to what happened next. According to Varaine (1949:13), Rarivoekembahoaka realised that resistance was futile, submitted, and was thus allowed to reign on.

In Ratsimbazafimahefa's version, Rarivoekembahoaka resisted until betrayed by his own daughter. She led Andrianampoinimerina's army via a secret path inside the hilltop and told them of the taboo against bringing black and white-faced steers into the compound at Kirioka. Acting on this information, the Merina deliberately broke the taboo. The sight of the tabooed animal signalled to Rarivoekembahoaka the destruction of his ancestors' authority and he submitted immediately to the Merina (Ratsimbazafimahefa 1971:100-1).

Varaine (1949:13) tells how Rarivoekembahoaka later rebelled at the urging of a disgraced former advisor to the new Merina king, Radama. Ratsimbazafimahefa's version is more interesting. Having conquered a neighbouring chief on behalf of Andrianampoinimerina, Rarivoekembahoaka then refused to hand over the spoils of the conquered fiefdom to his overlord. Irked by this refusal to render unto Caesar his due, Andrianampoinimerina sent his son and heir, Radama, to reinstall Merina authority. For a second time Kirioka was besieged. After a long period of resistance Rarivoekembahoaka was defeated. Many of his family and subjects and his family jumped to their deaths from the cliff-top; others were taken into bondage, and his cattle confiscated. Some of those captives became royal slaves (*tsiorindahy*) at the Merina court. A number of Rarivoekembahoaka's subjects - led by Ranirivola and Andriamanana - fled into the forest where they became founding ancestors of the Zafimaniry and Zafindriamanana respectively. Rarivoekembahoaka was allowed to stay on and rule, but his 20 *manambohinahitra* were replaced by ten Merina royal legates (*vadintany*) and the area to the south of the Fisakana river was put under the control of Andrianampoinimerina's general, Andriantsoandriana (Ratsimbazafimahefa 1971:103).

In the late twentieth century, Rarivoekembahoaka was still remembered in a yearly pilgrimage to Kirioka, and still stood as a symbol of local resistance to Merina rule. However, not all accounts focus on the military aspects of the Merina domination. According to Ravalitera Georges in Ambohipo, the conquest of Sahamadio was not a violent one, but was engineered by means of what he called *politika*

(politics) - probably a marriage alliance between a local chief and a representative of the Merina monarchy. Inter-ethnic marriages feature prominently in the oral narratives of the region, particularly amongst the ruling classes (Ratsimbazafimahefa 1971:26). Another piece of local tradition also suggests that the occupation of Sahamadio was peaceful: the name Sahamadio is said to derive from the fact that the Merina king used the valley to graze his cattle, and on finding that the local people could be trusted not to steal or harm them declared the valley to be a clean [i.e. honest] valley - *saha madio*. In truth, the subjugation of Fisakana was brought about by a mixture of war and diplomacy. Ruling potentates made convenient alliances when they realised opposition was futile. Besides, affiliation with Merina government could be used to great advantage, as we shall see in Chapter Four.

As the Merina occupation established itself, towns which had previously figured as surveillance posts for the Merina army grew into small centres of commerce and government (Dubois 1938:16). In addition to more soldiers came civil servants and traders. They were joined in the northern Betsileo region by peasants seeking new land as the population of Imerina exploded under the expansion and stabilisation of the empire (Deschamps 1972:189). Even in the 1990s these settlers still represented a population separate from their Betsileo neighbours, especially in the villages around Ambohimahaso. The Merina profited from a period of famine in Fisakana to buy land at a cheap rate. In the area immediately around Fandriana, however, the local Betsileo chiefs threatened that the ancestors would bring down misfortune on anyone selling their fields to the Merina. This is said to account for the scarcity of Merina peasants in that region (Ratsimbazafimahefa 1971:49). In those areas where land was appropriated, the Merina often put the Betsileo into debt service in the fields that had once been theirs (Raison-Jourde 1991:407). In Fisakana generally the Merina settlers were principally traders. The small town of Sandrandahy, fifteen miles south-west of Fandriana, was first settled (along with three nearby villages) by Merina expatriates in

1847 (Varaine 1960:5). It is still considered a Merina town, and the descendants of those colonists still man the counters of the stalls and shops there, their thin brown-red faces and straight hair marking out their ancestry. The town of Miadanimerina also still has a small population of Merina tradesmen living to the south of the hospital, among them the blacksmith and bicycle-mender Rason. The town itself - also confusingly known as Sahamadio - came to prominence under Merina rule. Like the name Sahamadio, Miadanimerina suggests a trouble-free occupation: it translates as 'peaceful Merina'. The naming or renaming of towns with Merina names which had positive associations of Merina government would seem to be part of deliberate strategy seeking to inscribe rule through toponymy. When Queen Ranavalona passed through the region in 1873, hundreds of peasants were drafted into building a special bridge for her to cross the Fisakana. They were made to provide a great meal for the Queen's retinue and to attend in their thousands. The place of the crossing was named Soanimpandalo - 'good passage' (Ratsimbazafimahefa 1971:108).

Despite the Merina activity in towns, the Betsileo continued to subsist largely from agriculture. No longer threatened by raids from rival chieftains, they left their protection to the Merina, and concentrated on their fields. 'Above all,' says Dubois, the Betsileo preferred 'his ricefield, his village, and his tranquillity' (1938:243). The Betsileo had become, in Deschamps' words, 'completely subjugated' (1972:190).

This was particularly true for the former kingdom of Fisakana. Whereas the southern Betsileo kingdoms were ruled by semi-direct administration, Fisakana was amalgamated with the mountainous and lawless Vakinankaratra region, and the two were absorbed under direct Merina control as one of the six administrative regions of Imerina (Dubois 1938:105-6). Whilst the people of Fisakana were ethnically Betsileo, they were politically Merina. This was to have a profound effect on the government, economy and cultural identity of the region.

Sahamadio under Merina rule

The military defeat of Fisakana prefigured by Radama's massacre of the Betsileo at Ambositra (Deschamps 1972:126) and concluded by the defeat of Rarivoekembahoaka at the siege of Kirioka near Fandriana in 1808 was confirmed politically in 1813 when the former kingdom was dissolved and divided into three smaller administrative areas by the Merina conquerors (Varaine 1949:13).

In the period immediately following conquest, the pattern of Merina rule was for the local nobles (*tomponmenakely*) to hold nominal powers over their subjects whilst remaining answerable to the Merina monarchy should they try to over-extend their privileges (Deschamps 1972:201). Their duties included the levying of taxes, which, without stable coinage, were paid in mats (Deschamps 1972:206), a speciality of the Fandriana region. To ease the process of tax collection scattered hamlets were encouraged to amalgamate near to roads and towns (Dubois 1938:39). The Merina government also took over the regulation of much ritual practice: adoption, inheritance, circumcision and burial - all previously organised by local descent groups - were taxed and codified to accord with prescribed Merina practice (Kottak 1980:106-9; see also Shaw 1877:347). Special market days were instituted, and standardised weights and measures introduced. In 1808 the burden of taxation, coupled with the authoritarian nature of the imperial government, led to a series of local uprisings against the Merina. The trouble was so severe that King Radama was obliged to visit Fisakana in person (Ratsimbazafimahefa 1971:105,107).

One of the three new administrative areas of the old kingdom of Fisakana covered the area around Fandriana and Miadanimerina, and thus included the valley of Sahamadio. Each of these rapidly growing towns housed a palace for the local *tomponmenakely*: Andriantsiranga in Fandriana, where he is still commemorated by a standing stone in the market place, and Ramahatra, son of local nobles, in Miadanimerina (Varaine 1949:13).

As Merina control of the region tightened, the number of government functionaries multiplied, reaching ever further into the rural power structures. Overseeing the administration of the region were senior Merina civil servants responsible for justice and the courts, the enforcement of government decrees and law and order. Below them local people were appointed 'chiefs of one thousand' and 'chiefs of one hundred' (*tompon-arivo, tompon-jato*) with responsibility for taxation, the organisation of forced labour, and the recruitment of soldiers (Deschamps 1972:202; London Missionary Society 1878:5). The numbers 100 and 1000 refer not to the number of their subjects, but to the number of men they were required to conscript into military service. Varaine (1949:13-14) recounts the story of one such local official, 'a simple citizen of Fandriana renowned for his height and strength' called Rainilaimainty. Promising to protect his fellow Betsileo from the excessive demands of the Merina, Rainilaimainty became elected first 'chief of one hundred' and then 'chief of one thousand'. He rose even further in the government hierarchy when he came to the attention of Queen Ranavalona II as she was passing through Fandriana in 1873. She conferred upon him the office of governor of the region (*ampahenin' Imerina*), a significant elevation for a Betsileo subject of Merina rule which demonstrates Rainilaimainty's considerable political skill in mediating between the populace on one hand and the colonisers on the other. He remained in the post for eleven years, and is one of several local notables to be credited with introducing Christian missionaries to Fisakana.

Among the local 'chiefs of 100' was the great grandson of Randriamahalefitra, Ravelona, based in Ambohipo. According to the ancestral history of the descendants of Randriamahalefitra, Ravelona was a chief not of one hundred men, but of one hundred and fifty. As a leader he was popular with both the senior administrators and the people he governed. He would often kill a sheep and invite the high-ranking officials to eat with him, but would also make sure there was meat and rice for the poor of the village too.

The men he ruled over were known as the ‘one hundred and fifty men’ (*diman-polo aman-jato lahy*). Rajean-Ba, a non-native resident of Ambohipo, told me that the ‘one hundred and fifty men’ were renowned throughout the region for their co-operation. One example of this, he said was that whenever one of them was ‘visiting’ a woman he would hang his loin cloth over the door as a sign to others not to disturb. They also had an agreement to co-operate in agricultural projects and so achieved great feats of cultivation in the valley. It seems probable that this co-operative endeavour was as much a result of their kinship relations as of their political co-affiliation - in effect these were one and the same thing. It is hard to know exactly the area covered by the organisation: if Ravelona was the ruler, then it is unlikely that it extended beyond the valley of Sahamadio, but the mayor claimed to me that it reached as far as Tsarazaza, ten miles north of Fandriana. Whatever its geographical dimensions, the ‘one hundred and fifty men’ were still celebrated in Ambohipo over a hundred years later as a model of co-operation and sound ancestral government.

This is ironic, since the political structure that on which the ‘one hundred and fifty men’ was founded was actually imposed by the Merina rulers. Moreover, it is likely that the major engineering works - such as the building of large dykes and drainage channels which transformed the boggy river valley of Sahamadio into a productive rice plain - were carried out by the local populace on the orders of the imperial Merina overlords via the local organising structure of the ‘one hundred and fifty men’. This would have been in line with the economic policy instigated by Andrianampoinimerina to make all his subjects self-sufficient in rice: ‘The only enemy of my kingdom is famine,’ the Merina king is famously reported as saying. ‘If one is hungry one cannot think of the state: the great look to devour the small, and the small look to theft’ (Callet 1908:497). That these feats of forced labour are remembered as co-operative endeavour is due partly to the kinship-based nature of local political structure, and partly to the rather rose-tinted view that people in Sahamadio had of

the nature of the society of their ancestors. In the same context it is worth noting that Merina royal discourse promoted the image of the kingdom as a family whose parent was the monarch (Raison-Jourde 1991:111).

The institution of the *fokonolona* (village councils) described as follows by Deschamps was also a Merina imposition:

At the head of each *fokonolona* a commander was designated who held executive power. Rainilaiarivony [the Merina prime minister] encouraged the *fokonolona* to draw up charters to help the government in the application of laws, the maintenance of order, the apprehension of criminals, the upkeep of paths, and the exposure of any suspicious activity. They also served as societies to help the poor. In principle, all the members of the *fokonolona* attended the assemblies of senior administrators, made proposals and, in general, took decisions. The *fokonolona* could dismiss its leader and impose fines on its members. Application was uneven, but there was there the germ of basic democracy and a basic model of communal responsibility inherited from the previous system of clans (Deschamps 1972:202, my translation).

The institution of the *fokonolona* described above matches closely with a description of a pledge made by the villagers of Ambohipo in the last years of the Merina occupation. The mayor described it to me as follows.

There was an agreement made in 1885 between the villagers. They took a pledge to abide by certain communal rules. Then they speared an ox through the heart to symbolise what would happen to anybody who betrayed the pledge. Then the blood of the black ox was scattered in blessing. This established Ambohipo as the capital of Sahamadio, for it was specified that if any business was to be done to do with communal issues, then it had to be done in Ambohipo.

This is remarkably similar to an account given by Julien (1909:367) of the founding of a *fokonolona* in Imerina. Indeed, the Ambohipo pledge seems to have been a ritualised elaboration of the principles of the Merina *fokonolona* system cast in the form of a local ancestral blessing. At the level of local politics the story of the pledge demonstrates the struggle by Ambohipo to be recognised as the central political power in the valley - the meaning of the name Ambohipo is, after all, 'the village at the heart'. According to the ancestral history of the Twelve Men, power had already passed from Ambohipo to nearby Milamaina some years before this pact due to the early death, aged 30, of Ravelona's son Randriambesikina. The pledge may have been an attempt to seize back the political initiative in the valley from neighbouring Milamaina. This is an ongoing struggle which has taken many forms over the years. I was told that it started with a fall-out over the reciprocal loan of cattle for trampling the rice fields between kin in the two villages. This led to an ancestral taboo on marriage between Ambohipo and Milamaina still observed in the 1990s. However, it is also said that the original settlers of Milamaina were refugees from near Antsirabe who arrived in Sahamadio in flight from Sakalava raiders (Ratsimbazafimahefa 1971: 56). This would explain the lack of marriage ties and general antipathy from the people of Ambohipo.

One aspect of Merina rule which had significant impact on the population of Imerina was *fanompoana* (forced labour). The meaning of the term is variable according to context: it can be religious, political or economic in nature - or often it is a combination of all three. Under the Merina empire of the nineteenth century *fanompoana* entailed sacred duty to the monarch in the form of economic service to the government, essentially two sides of the same coin. For the adult male population of Sahamadio *fanompoana* meant significant periods of time away from the ricefields to labour in government service such as the chalk quarry at Antsirabe or the gold mines of Tsarazaza in the north of Fisakana (Deschamps 1972:189,209; Varaine 1949:24). According to Varaine, the forced labour was heavy and the workers

were mistreated and oppressed. They served their time at the sulphur springs of Antsirabe or working as bearers carrying goods to Antananarivo or supplies to the foundry deep in the forest at Mantasoa where Jean Laborde made weapons for the Merina government (Varaine 1949:13). The foundry was a massive venture which required the forced labour of 20,000 men to build and 1,000 to operate (Deschamps 1972:166). The cannons, guns, cartridges and grenades manufactured at Mantasoa provided the armoury with which the Merina maintained military superiority over much of the island. It is a typically colonial irony that the subjected Betsileo were then forced into the production of more of the arms that had subjugated them in the first place. Doubly ironic is the fact that the Merina conquerors prohibited the Betsileo from carrying their own weapons. This is the story of Randriamaninana, great grandson of Randriamahalefitra, as told in the history of the Twelve Men.

Randriamaninana didn't like the Ambaniandro [Merina] because when Andrianampoinimerina and Laidama [Radama] conquered Kirioka they confiscated anything that could be used as a weapon (guns, spears etc.).

But Randriamaninana had a very nice gun which he didn't hand in but hid in the ox ditch down to the west of Anosy. But people are like wood and he was attacked by a weevil. For somebody reported him to the Merina government, saying: 'Randriamaninana is still looking to rebel for he is hiding a gun.' Then the Tsialainga came from Antananarivo to enforce the law.

As a punishment Randriamaninana was to be exiled to hard labour. When his father-in-law Randriantsimiavokolahiny heard this then he called for Randriamaninana's wife Renaitombo and their children to come and live with him at Antanivony. But Rafarantsa would hear nothing of it and said: 'If Daddy is going to be forced to labour for other people then I too will labour with him.' What a love she showed for her father! However, Randriamaninana was not sent into exile but was locked up for a month.

Rafarantsa was a woman of great courage and for showing such love to her father Rasimona Pierre made her a tomb at Anosy and called it Ifitiavandraiamandreny ('filial love').

It was very sad what befell Randriamaninana but he said: 'The Ambaniandro cannot touch me now.' He is buried in the tomb at Anosy.

For those who could afford it, forced labour could be avoided by paying another person to do it on one's behalf. This was the strategy of Ralaizafy, great great great grandson of Randriamahalefitra, as told in the story of the Twelve Men.

Ralaizafy really detested doing forced labour. It troubled him in every way, especially as he became very ill with whooping cough. So he arranged for some of his relatives to do his share for him. 'You do my labour' he said 'and I will pay you back whatever the value is in money.'

But these words were too free and they took advantage of him. For if the value of the work was one *ariary* then they told him it was three. And they didn't do this two or three times but many times each year. And if they wanted to buy meat on Saturdays then they simply turned up on Friday and said to Ralaizafy that they had been doing some of his labour for him and that he owed them one *ariary* when they had done no such work at all but just wanted to buy meat. So Ralaizafy had to make do with dried meat on Saturday evenings. This happened to him many times and although his wealth was great it was not long before it had all gone, for even though there may be much rice in the store, the stove takes some every day and it is soon gone.

One day the swindlers arrived to collect money for the forced labour. Maybe there was something to pay, maybe there was nothing, but they asked for four *ariary*. Ralaizafy had no money so they took a beautiful brown cow, for they had no fear of God. They returned the next week demanding ten *ariary* and so he let them take their pleasure with the slave women. Ralaizafy's son Rainilaikisoa was ashamed at what happened but dared not cast blame upon his father, so he did nothing. But eventually he explained to his father what was happening.

‘Look, it’s gone too far [lit. ‘it’s reached the chopping block’]. It won’t be long before all our property and slaves are gone and all of us brothers and you three [Ralaizafy and his two wives] will become other people’s slaves. We must do the labour ourselves.’ Then tears fell from Rainilaikisoa’s eyes and he left his father.

Then Rainilaikisoa gathered those of his brothers who were grown up and the slaves and he said to them: ‘What is happening has gone too far and we’re going to beat these fraudsters. Is it not better to do forced labour and keep our father’s property than to become other people’s slaves?’ And they all agreed.

One month later the cheats came to the house and demanded that Ralaizafy pay them 15 *ariary*. ‘I don’t have it,’ he said, ‘but there are still three cows and some slaves - take what you want.’ ‘We’ll take one of the male slaves,’ they said.

Ralaizafy called out all his slaves. Some of them were heavily built and were carrying clubs under their arms as Rainilaikisoa had told them to. Then he and his brothers appeared carrying long knives. The crooks suspected nothing and chose themselves a slave, the companion of Rainilaikisoa who went around with him every day.

‘That was an unlucky choice,’ said Rainilaikisoa. ‘You’ve come to cheat us, well you’re out of your depth here [lit. ‘your fish-trawling basket is nearing the mud’]. You’ll pay for this with your lives. Let them have it, boys!’ Then they all reached for their clubs and knives and set upon them with blows. Ralaizafy shook in his skin to see what Rainilaikisoa was doing. The crooks were scared stiff and fled for their lives down to the south as fast as their legs could carry them. Rainilaikisoa followed them fearlessly throwing stones. And they never came back again.

So it was that Rainilaikisoa showed himself to be a man and took over his father’s forced labour, whether it was light or heavy, near or far.

Fanompoana also took the form of military service in the Merina army. Later in the story of the Twelve Men Rainilaikisoa goes off to fetch his younger brothers back from Antsirabe where they have joined the army. Deschamps records that the Betsileo made reluctant

and recalcitrant conscripts (1972:205), deserting in numbers on the 1836 Merina expedition to the south of the island (1972:168). Subjection, he says, had been accepted by the Betsileo not for war but for peace - they preferred to get on with cultivating their ricefields (1972:190).

Nevertheless, many from Sahamadio did go off to fight for the Merina army. Randriamaninana, before he got into trouble for hiding his gun, was part of an expedition to the perennial enemy of the Merina, the Sakalava. This was probably Radama's 1822 campaign against the Sakalava Menabe, since the route south from Antananarivo at that time passed directly down the valley of Sahamadio.

Randriamaninana went with his three sons Randriamalaza, Randriamananedena and Razafindriamidona, all of whom were killed in battle. When he arrived home in Sahamadio, Randriamaninana raised three standing stones to their memory beside the tomb in the village now called Ambatolahy ('at the place of the standing stones'). They still stand there to the east of the tomb.

Radolphe told me the story of how his great grandfather Rainiangana was called up to fight in what was probably the disastrous campaign against the Sakalava near Manja in 1873:

Rainiangana was known as a brave-hearted soldier. One night when his son Rabenoa was still a newborn baby he was summoned to go and fight against the Sakalava. There was no arguing with the call-up so he got ready to go. As he was about to go the baby became very sad, so he went up to him and gave him his little finger to suck, saying; 'There is the call of the soldiers, my boy, and your father must go off to the wars.' Then off he went with his soldier friends.

The family could hardly wait for the time when he would return. They waited and waited for him.

In those days there was a cart which carried those who had died in the wars back home to the land of their ancestors. When the cart arrived in the valley of Sahamadio it stopped at Ambohimandriana and somebody shouted: 'Here are the bodies of the soldiers who have died

in the war.' It was with great sadness that Rainiangana's family saw his body there with the corpses of the soldiers. And they took him home to be buried.

These wars fought on behalf of the Merina empire were a considerable drain on local manpower. But in another way they added to the local labour pool. The conquests in the west of the island secured the capture of thousands of prisoners of war. These were brought back to the highlands where they were sold as slaves. Slave markets were a feature of the developing imperial economy, and the wealthier landowners of Sahamadio, such as Ralaizafy, acquired slaves in numbers. The nature of the slaves' capture and sale made it impossible for them to return home. Contact with their place of origin was lost. These slaves swelled the pool of bonded labour which was the legacy of the days of hilltop raiding. These slaves and their descendants constituted a significant proportion of the population of Sahamadio, and we have seen them mentioned in the history of the Twelve Men. Their labour was undoubtedly important in the agricultural and economic development of the valley, although they were marginalised socially and ritually. This marginalisation is crucial to understanding social differentiation in Ambohipo. It is discussed at greater length in Chapter Four.

The period of Merina occupation lasted less than a hundred years, but it was nevertheless a time of great change in Sahamadio. Having once hunted on hilltops, the people now farmed in the valleys. Having once fought amongst themselves, they now went off to war on behalf of an occupying power. One of the least settled zones of the highlands had become one of the most populous. Once ruled by the random vacillations of the local feudal system, the people were now effectively governed from Antananarivo.

But as Merina dominance waned more change was on the horizon. In 1871 the first Norwegian missionaries arrived in the valley. In 1884 the locally born governor Rainilaimainty died and was replaced by a Merina Catholic in Ambositra - a sure sign of the

shifting balance of foreign power at the heart of the Merina monarchy (Raison-Jourde 1991:431). As the curtain fell on one colonial age in Sahamadio, so it rose on another: 'the time of the *vazaha*'.

The arrival of the missionaries

The first *vazaha* (Europeans - see glossary) in Ambohipo were missionaries. In 1866 the Norsk Missionar Societ (NMS) instigated a programme of evangelisation in the mountainous Vakinankaratra region around Antsirabe (Bianquis 1907:25). It was not until three years later that a preacher from Antananarivo, Rainikoto, brought the Lutheran word to Fisakana. After one year at Tsarazaza in the north of the region Rainikoto returned to the capital and his duties were taken over by a certain Rainitsitohaina. Rainitsitohaina had two sons, Rapetera and Rajohanesa (note the Norwegian-style Christian names), and these three men were the first in the district to be baptised and to learn to read the bible (Rakotonjanahary 1967:118). The Lutheran missionary record (Rakotonjanahary 1967) notes that Stueland, a representative of the NMS, was brought to Fandriana in 1871 at the request of Ratsitohaina by the Norwegian missionary Rosaas, who was at that time in charge of the Lutheran station at Loharano just south of Antsirabe. Raison-Jourde (1991:432) credits Ratahiry - who apparently also introduced the Jesuits - with bringing Stueland. Ratsimbazafimahefa (1971:107) gives the credit to the local governor, Rainilaimainty. The discrepancy over this matter is no doubt a result of competing claims to the honourable status conferred by effecting the introduction of missionaries.

In the early days of his mission Stueland was housed at the palace of the *tomponmenakely* in Fandriana until he was able to build a mission station. It was usual for missionaries to lodge with prominent members of the community at first, often with nobles (Skeie 1999:80). It is perhaps no coincidence therefore that the majority (65%) of the first Malagasy converts to Lutheranism were drawn from the upper classes (Fuglestad & Lode 1986:65). At first Stueland found difficulty establishing himself. As the Samaritans

impeded the Jews building their temple (Ezra 4), says Rakotonjanahary, so did the people of Andraimasina prevent the construction of Stueland's mission; but he met less resistance at Ambozantany and built a fine mission station there instead (Rakotonjanahary 1967:118). This was the first brick building in Fandriana, and it started such a fashion for brick houses in the town that people ceased to use wood (Raison-Jourde 1991:432).

By mid-September 1872 Stueland was settled in his new mission station, and able to invite his compatriot and colleague J.T. Nygaard to join him in the district. Nygaard founded a mission station at Ambohipo on land given to him by one of the Twelve Men, Rasalamonina. This became the first mission in Sahamadio, the strategy being to attract the rural population to church by making the village at the heart of the valley into the centre of local evangelisation. But this station did not last long and was left vacant when Nygaard moved to Manandona near Antsirabe in 1880 (Rakotonjanahary 1967:118). One local story suggests that the local population were far from totally convinced of the Christian message. Suffering at one time from a prolonged dry spell, the people of Sahamadio resorted to banging drums and rattling pots and pans in an effort to summon the rains. The missionary family heard this terrible clamour and took fright, fleeing their lonely house on the western outskirts of the village for the safety of Fandriana, in fear of what they took for marauding brigands. This is perhaps how the departure of Nygaard from Ambohipo has come to be remembered locally.

The presence of Europeans in the village was still remembered by such stories when I lived in Ambohipo over a century later. In physical terms it was also witnessed in a small and lonely grave half hidden amongst the eucalyptus to the west of the Lutheran church. It is said to be the grave of a *vazaha* child who died of fever, but nobody I asked could tell me exactly when the child died, only that it was in the 'time of the *vazaha*'. Like the standing stones raised by Randriamaninana to the sons he lost in the Sakalava war, the tomb of the *vazaha* child documents history by its continued presence in the

human landscape of the village. The dates may be lost, but the social history remains alive, and the story of the *vazaha* child's tomb was known to every child in Ambohipo.

The early years of missionary activity did not bear great fruit for the Norwegian Lutherans. As most of Imerina was dominated by the London Missionary Society (LMS), the Norwegians made the Vakinankaratra and the northern Betsileo region the focus of their evangelising endeavours. It was a difficult place to be at a turbulent time. The area was mountainous and isolated, and had long provided a refuge for outlaws and dissenters from central government. As the Merina empire slowly descended into decadence the political situation in Fisakana and Vakinankaratra grew less stable. The government imposed a growing tax burden on the populace and launched unpopular measures to recruit military and civil *fanompoana*; corruption was endemic amongst local Merina functionaries (Fuglestad & Lode 1986:75). It was not a stable political climate in which to carry out missionary work.

Mission schools and *fanompoana*

To add to the missionaries' problems, the position of the NMS was tenuous, relying as it did on the goodwill of the host government. One means of staying in favour was the institution of schooling. The first mission school in Ambohipo was held in the Lutheran church building: to use the local idiom, the school was to the church as the cow's horns to its ears (Rakotonjanahary 1967:120). Schooling was seen as the most effective way of attracting adherents to the new faith, and it was the younger generation that was seen to be most receptive to the Christian message (Scarborough & Fuglestad 1986:102). But it was not simply a case of the missionaries pushing schooling at the people: the Betsileo themselves were eager to acquire literacy as a life skill. The Merina government, however, was not primarily interested in the educational or spiritual role of the mission schools, rather it saw them as a way of keeping track of the rural population and thereby providing forced labour. Indeed it has been argued that in the last

years of the Merina empire the missionaries acted as little more than agents of the state, and that the church and school were simply symbols to the rural Malagasy of state oppression (Campbell 1988; Raison-Jourde 1991). The registration and control of the rural youth by means of the mission schools provided manpower for the army and civil forms of forced labour. It may well have been with this in mind that the Prime Minister Rainilaiarivony passed a law in 1881 making schooling compulsory. This led to a massive increase in the attendance at mission schools so that in comparison to other African colonies at the time Madagascar's school population was outstandingly high. In Vakinankaratra and Fisakana the number of students attending mission schools rose from 4000 in the late 1870s to 30,000 in 1883. Such statistics would no doubt have impressed church authorities and donors back in Norway, although the content of the curriculum might have raised eyebrows. In Fandriana, Stueland noted that much of the students' school time was spent practising military drills and learning to use weapons (Scarborough & Fuglestad 1986:105); as much as half the curriculum in mission schools was taken up in this fashion (Campbell 1988:59).

The use of schools for recruiting *fanompoana* had a negative effect on student numbers. Fear of the draft meant that many young people were reluctant to go to school at all. But even absence did not spare them from *fanompoana* since the government instructed the missions to single out the absent or 'lazy' (*malaina*) students for forced labour in the gold mines in northern Fisakana (Scarborough & Fuglestad 1986:106) or even for army service (Raison-Jourde 1991:432). At times this could mean the missions sending off 40% of their students to do forced labour. The Fisakana region was particularly affected by high rates of military conscription. Although they were partly complicit in the draft, local church leaders nevertheless complained that their work was severely disrupted by the excessive demands of central government. Moreover, the drafting was liable to be conducted on a sectarian basis. One case, reported by a Malagasy pastor from Ambohipo, involved a Catholic government

official commandeering 800 Lutheran pupils to work in the gold mines at Tsarazaza. Such partisan drafting was apparently common and had led in some cases to the rival mission schools kidnapping each other's pupils as they saw their own ranks depleted by the demands of *fanompoana* (Campbell 1988:60-2).

The connection between schooling and *fanompoana* severely compromised the Lutherans' mission in Fisakana. In many ways they were not so much agents of the government as pawns in its imperial endgame. Schooling and teaching were both defined by the government as forms of *fanompoana*, so the missionaries found themselves in the curious position that the very government that filled their classrooms was also responsible for emptying them when it needed a workforce. As the Merina empire declined so its demands increased. The symbiotic relationship of schooling with *fanompoana* in Fisakana had fixed in the minds of the rural population a strong connection between the Church and the state, between Europeans and an exploitative government. This explains much of the anti-missionary violence of the Menalamba uprising of 1896 (Campbell 1988).

Clearly the Norwegian Lutheran mission to Fisakana had not been an unqualified success in its early years. It had allied itself with a faltering imperial Merina government and to a certain extent had paid the price of its collaboration. The fact that the Ambohipo mission station was abandoned in 1880 can be taken to indicate that the population of Sahamadio was far from convinced of the benefits of the new religion.

The French occupation

It was this climate of faltering missions, political instability, and a populace over-burdened with the labour demands of a crumbling Merina regime that faced the new French colonial government when it arrived in Fisakana in 1896. Varaine claims that 'due to the exactions demanded by the Merina government between 1885 and 1895, the arrival of the French was greeted with joy by the people of Fisakana' (Varaine 1949:14). This is one interpretation of events. To much of the

population of the region, however, it must have seemed that one form of unwanted imperial interference was simply being replaced by another. Certainly, the leaders of the Menalamba uprising (see Ellis 1985) did not welcome the French with joy.

The Menalamba revolt reached Fandriana in July 1896, venting its rage on the symbols of European presence by sacking and burning churches, schools and even the recently-built Lutheran hospital at Ambatolahifolaka (Rakotonjanahary 1967:119). The inhabitants of Fandriana abandoned the town until order was restored by the arrival in the district of units of the French foreign legion (Varaine 1949:14). The rebellion reached beyond Fandriana down into the valley of Sahamadio where the Catholic church at Milamaina (founded in 1886 by the Jesuit Père Berthieu) was destroyed. It may even have reached the Lutheran Mission station at Ambohipo, for, according to a story told to me by the elderly Lutheran Rageorges, a plot was hatched by frightened locals to kill the missionary family living in the Lutheran parsonage. The people were about to carry out their massacre when they were prevented by a tumultuous thunderstorm which kept them at home, thus sparing the lives of the *vazaha*. Since the downpour occurred at the height of the dry season Rageorges took this as evidence of divine intervention.

Hardly had the new government quelled the Menalamba uprising than they had further problems on their hands. Although the new colonial government was secular in outlook, the fact that it represented a Catholic country gave a boost to the Catholic missions. In order to counter the Catholic ascendancy, the three Protestant missions agreed to divide the highlands into areas of influence. Under this arrangement the LMS, and later the Mission Protestante Française, concentrated their efforts on the area to the north of the Mania river, and the Lutherans evangelised in the country to the south. As the Lutheran church in Ambohipo had been founded prior to this agreement, it remained under Lutheran control. Despite this Protestant alliance the arrival of the new regime still threatened to disrupt the NMS's virtual monopoly in Fisakana, so French Lutherans were

brought to Fandriana (Rakotonjanahary 1967:119); this must have gone some way towards demonstrating to the locals that Protestantism too had a French connection.

The increased prominence of the Catholics fuelled intense competition between rival denominations striving to fill their own churches and classrooms. Regardless of the fact that the colonial government did not represent the Catholic Church, there was nevertheless a belief amongst many Malagasy that the government would favour Catholics. There was even a rumour circulating in the northern Betsileo district that Protestants would be enslaved or even killed under the new regime (Ellis 1985:108).

This combination of tactical affiliation and scaremongering led to large-scale conversion to Catholicism. The pattern this took amongst the Betsileo was for whole Protestant congregations to switch to the Catholic faith and then claim the church as their own, justifying this action by the claim that it was they who had built the church in the first place (Vigen & Tronchon 1993:329). To mark the appropriation of the building the newly-Catholic congregation would place a cross on their church. One British missionary was so enraged on seeing a cross on his temple that he climbed on to the roof and kicked it off, for which impulsive action he was made to answer to a native tribunal composed entirely of Catholics (Ellis 1985:115). Rakotonjanahary claims that in 1897 all the Lutheran churches in Fandriana had crosses placed on them and that the congregations and teachers were forced to become Catholic; anyone who resisted was denounced to the government as a leader of insurgents and consequently jailed (Rakotonjanahary 1967:119). By late 1897 the religious factionalism in the northern Betsileo region had escalated into severe sectarian violence. Out of the 62 Protestant churches in the Ambositra region, 11 had been destroyed and a further 40 had been requisitioned by Catholics. So concerned was Governor Gallieni that he embarked on a tour of the region freeing prisoners and urging religious tolerance.

This sectarian strife was still remembered a century later in Ambohipo. One well-known and very graphic account of that troubled

time tells of how a family stood one Sunday at the crossroads near the bridge at Milamaina undecided as to which church one of their sons was to attend. From each church a crowd appeared arguing the cause of their own faith so vehemently that a fight broke out. The rival congregations each grabbed one of the boy's arms and pulled him towards their church. The Protestants pulled one way, the Catholics pulled the other until the boy was torn down the middle and died.

Another story tells of how the Catholics came to Ambohipo - purportedly on an evangelical mission - to claim the Lutheran church as their own. Four Catholic *vazaha* on horseback came riding into the village from Milamaina led by the local man Rabefa. The people of Ambohipo were so frightened that they locked themselves inside the Lutheran church. The *vazaha* then apparently tried to force entry into the church by getting their horses to kick the door with their hooves while they chiselled away at the frame.

This story seems to refer to the time when requisitioning of Lutheran churches by Catholics was common in the area. It is clearly anti-Catholic in tone and content; when I repeated it back to an elderly Catholic he claimed it was nonsense and that it was the Lutherans who persecuted the Catholics. The tensions of which such stories speak were rarely expressed openly when I lived in Ambohipo, but in a way were all the more potent for that. According to Pasteur Rakotondrason, the Catholic-Lutheran friction was caused by wider political and religious tensions in Europe which manifested themselves in intense competition for adherents amongst the normally peaceful Betsileo. Certainly the European missions were hungry for souls, but it seems that a certain amount of politico-religious opportunism on the part of the Malagasy was also to blame for the conflict.

In some ways Pastor Rakotondrason was correct to state that Lutheran-Catholic enmity in Ambohipo had its roots in a broader international power game, but it seems that the issue of religion widened a fault line already existing in Ambohipo society. The existing fissure can be traced to the fact that Ralaizafy, the father of the Twelve Men, had two wives simultaneously, fathering seven male

heirs by one wife and five by the other. This became an issue in church politics when, according to the version told me by the mayor, a dispute arose concerning the ownership of the church built by the *fokonolona* for Pastor Nygaard. Many of the churches in the northern Betsileo area were built using *fanompoana* labour (see Campbell 1988; Skeie 1999:94), and the Lutheran church in Ambohipo probably was too. Thus the whole community had been involved in its construction. When ownership became contested - no doubt as a result of a swing towards Catholicism and an attempt to requisition it - the case was brought before a tribunal in Fandriana. The tribunal ruled that the church belonged to the Lutherans, and that anyone who was not happy with the decision should go and join the Catholics. This split Ralaizafy's sons into two groups: the seven sons of Raonizanakandriamasy who stayed with the Lutherans, and the five sons of Raonivo who went off to become Catholics. Neither group was thereafter allowed to change sides.

Prior ownership of the church did not always guarantee success in court, as many similar cases testify. The reason for the Lutheran's victory in Ambohipo is not clear. Since the higher ranks of Fandriana society were Lutherans, it may have been the case that they had influential friends on the tribunal; or their victory could have been due to Gallieni's order that all churches requisitioned by the Catholics had to be returned (Vigen & Tronchon 1993:330). Whatever the reason, the Catholics lost out in Ambohipo and it was not until the 1920s that they got a church building of their own.

The ramifications of this split were still visible in Ambohipo when I lived there a century later. Although, as had once been the case, it was no longer a matter for excommunication, there was almost no intermarriage between the two denominations - effectively the two distinct blood lines descending from the two wives. Denominational difference - like the question of slave descent - was not an issue for open discussion; there were no ecumenical activities to unite the two churches; relationships between Catholics and Lutherans, whilst cordial, were rarely close.

Things had been far worse. Rasoa, remembering her schooldays in the 1960s, told me how children attending the rival Lutheran and Catholic mission schools would sometimes insult and attack each other in the village. When the Catholic missions closed down, Catholic parents refused to send their children to the Lutheran school in Ambohipo, making them walk three miles to Miadanimerina instead.

Nowhere was the factionalism more apparent than in the field of education. The presence in Ambohipo of rival mission schools ensured a daily segregation of the village's children which they reproduced in adulthood. It was not until the post-independence educational reforms of the 1970s that Lutheran and Catholic children in Ambohipo shared the same curriculum and learning space. In many ways the place of learning would seem to have been more influential in driving the two denominations apart than would the place of worship: Church was a Sunday affair, schooling an everyday one.

Even after the sectarian violence of 1897 had subsided, the competition between Catholics and Lutherans continued, particularly in relation to the classroom. The colonial government did not overtly favour the Catholic missions, but it did favour French language and culture, and this worked against the Norwegians in Fisakana. In 1896 Gallieni had passed a law making the teaching of French compulsory in all schools, and stipulating that half the school day be spent on this one subject. This caused problems for the Lutheran teaching mission, whose knowledge of French was minimal. At the time the Norwegians were running three schools in Fandriana: a primary school, an industrial school, and a girls' boarding school. The new legislation put these under threat. The arrival in Fandriana of the French Lutheran Pastor Péchin was perhaps an attempt to address this problem.

Nevertheless, the Lutherans found it hard to meet the new standards set by Gallieni, and particularly by his successor Augagneur. Augagneur was much more ruthlessly anti-clerical than Gallieni, and he saw it as the government's duty to prevent the indigenisation of the Christian religion, which he feared would compromise French

authority and retard the civilisation of the country (Esoavelomandroso 1993:348). In 1906 Augagneur passed a new law which forbade church schools from operating without written permission, and which banned teaching in church buildings (Scarborough & Fuglestad 1986:111). Although the date of its construction is not recorded, it seems likely that it was this law that led to the building of the purpose-built Lutheran mission school in Ambohipo.

Despite the secular educational policies of early colonial governments, mission schooling survived in the rural areas of Fisakana until independence. In fact, after Augagneur's departure mission schools found a new lease of life, and nursery and primary education in particular flourished. In 1930, 40% of government senior schools in Madagascar relied upon mission schools for their intake; the figure was no doubt much higher in the heavily missionised highlands (Esoavelomandroso 1993: 355). In 1949 the Lutheran Mission still ran 17 schools in the district, educating nearly 2000 children and employing 39 teachers including the Norwegian headmistress of the Lutheran high school in Fandriana. The French Protestant Mission working in the northern part of the district had 12 primary schools, each with about 100 pupils and one teacher. The Catholic Mission ran 23 schools providing education for about 3000 pupils. Together, these three missions accounted for 81 per cent of the school intake in Fisakana; the government's 'official' schools based in the principal towns of Fandriana, Miadanimerina, Miandriavazo, Tsarazaza, Sandrandahy, Fiadanana and Miarinavaratra made up the remaining 19 per cent (Varaine 1949:36-41).

Even though the French government built schools at either end of the valley of Sahamadio, in Fandriana and Miadanimerina, many people in Ambohipo still continued to send their children to the small village mission schools. So it seems that there was a division of labour in terms of education provision in Fisakana. The colonial government left primary schooling in the villages to the missions, and then absorbed a large proportion of the ablest of those students into its town-based secondary schools and technical schools from where many

graduated to become civil servants in the colonial government. As such the state was very reliant upon the missions for the formative education of its employees. In return, the missions saw their former pupils elevated to positions of responsibility in society.

The colonial administration in Sahamadio

The period of the French colonial presence in Sahamadio brought the people of the valley into contact with central government to an unprecedented degree: not only did the French administration reach deep into the valley, but many of the valley's population became part of the administration. Once the area had been pacified after the Menalamba uprising, the new government put in place its own administrative machinery. Fisakana was divided into cantons, each with a chef-lieu, and each canton was subdivided into *communes rurales*.

One of the principal aims of creating such distinct units of government was to facilitate taxation. Gallieni was keen for the Malagasy to abandon their subsistence economy, and he believed firmly that taxation was a way of liberating the Malagasy from barter and educating them in the use of cash (Covell 1987:20). With this in mind Gallieni targeted the rural economy by raising taxes on ricefields and livestock amounting to an average of 25 francs per year per man. Understandably this sum proved difficult to raise for peasants operating in a non-monetary economy (Deschamps 1972:250). One consequence in Sahamadio was that whereas farmers had previously kept a number of cattle which they used for trampling the ricefields and which they shared with kin on a reciprocal basis for that purpose, they now sold off most of their cattle to avoid paying tax. This led to a demise in the traditional kin-based method of preparing the fields by chasing and wrestling with the herds in the fields, and to a greater use instead of the harrow, which only needed one or two oxen to pull it; kin-based reciprocal transplanting also declined. This transition occurred particularly in the more populous parts of the region (Varaine 1949:18). In the hinterland of Sahamadio, away from the eyes of the

tax inspector, people tended to hold on to their cattle and to prepare the fields as before. In an attempt to prevent the evasion of taxes in isolated locations the colonial government tried to oblige distant hamlets to relocate in more populous and accessible places where possessions could be counted and taxed. The tax on livestock and fields was still in force when I lived in Ambohipo, and the tax form was still in French.

A further burden imposed by the colonial government on the people of Sahamadio was forced labour. Although Gallieni had originally retained elements of the pre-colonial *fanompoana* system, he later abandoned it when it became open to abuse. However, it was partially re-instated in 1907 by Augagneur in the form of ten days' service per year for men between the ages of sixteen and sixty. This initially involved recruiting labour for local projects, but under Governor Olivier (1924-9) it was expanded into grander schemes such as the building of national highways. Several men from Ambohipo laboured on the main north-south route which at that time passed through Tsarazaza in northern Fisakana. Olivier also instigated another system of mandatory public service known as the 'service de la main-d'oeuvre des travaux d'intérêt général' (SMOTIG). This labour system accomplished civil engineering projects such as the Fianarantsoa-Manakara railway by drafting non-military adults into work camps for a period of up to 3 years (Deschamps 1972:256). It was retained until 1946 (Covell 1987:20).

It seems that the hospital at Fandriana, founded in 1927, was built using some form of mandatory government service. The hospital consisted of two buildings containing 52 beds, 20 of which were dedicated for maternity patients. Later a hospital was planned for Ambohipo, but the idea was rejected by the local official, Rajohanesa, who lived in the village at the time of planning and was apparently afraid of infection. It seems that Rajohanesa was a fairly influential individual: not only did he successfully veto the hospital, but he is said to have been given guns by the French to defend the valley from bandits at a time when most Malagasy were banned from bearing

arms. His ruined house in Ambohipo was once identified to me by a small girl as ‘the governor’s house’ (*tranon’ ny mpanjaka*), although she could tell me nothing about him.

The authority conferred upon Rajohanesa is one example of the involvement of local people in the colonial administration, a legacy of Gallieni’s *politique des races*. Rural taxation was carried out by local officials whose civil service duties put them in an ambiguous position between the government and the people. The government office in Fandriana was responsible for a number of native administrative employees. The Chef du District, Varaine, lists his staff as follows: a detachment of 20 native guards commanded by a French gendarme, a native special constable, 12 native civil servants, 16 nurses and midwives, three Malagasy doctors, a vet and three postal workers (Varaine 1953:13).

Sahamadio in the colonial administration

However, it was the administrative staff exported from Fandriana to other parts of the island which really became the defining feature of the district in the colonial period. Varaine notes that the region featured amongst the most highly schooled in Madagascar, and that the government could not keep up with the demand for official schools in rural areas. The people, he said, were building schools on their own initiative, but there was a lack of qualified teaching staff to meet the demand (Varaine 1949: 41). This passion for schooling provided the region’s principal export. Lacking material or mineral wealth for the colonial government to exploit, Fisakana became famous for its intellectual output. Varaine notes the educational and professional success characteristic of the region, describing the population as amongst the most ‘evolved’ of the Betsileo (1949:27).

The 1940s and 1950s saw a rapid expansion in the number of people acceding to employment in the professional - usually government - sector. Most of these started off as pupils in mission schools and then graduated to the state-run institutions, notably the government’s École Régionale in Ambositra. A new native

professional class was created mostly of secretaries, interpreters, doctors, nurses and teachers who found themselves posted throughout the island in government service. Fandriana became known as the seedbed of civil servants (Deschamps 1959:110). Natives of Fisakana were to be found in every major town in Madagascar, where they formed associations, staged parades and organised credit unions to ensure that they could meet the cost of repatriation should they die far from the *tanindrazana*. It is a measure of Fisakana's presence in the civil service that an early leader of the Union of Indigenous Civil Servants, Rakoto Mananjan, was a native of Fandriana. Mananjan later went on to work for the metropolitan administration at the Assemblée de l'Union Française in Paris (Varaine 1949:27); he was one of many natives of Fisakana who went to France either to train or work during the colonial era.

The scale of educational success stamped an indelible mark on the identity of the region, both in the eyes of its own people and in those of the Malagasy at large. Even though the boom years were long gone when I lived in Sahamadio, the Fisakana contingent in the post-independence administration was still considerable. The region was represented at every level from low-ranking clerks to the one-time presidential candidate Manandafy Rakotonirina. When I travelled around Madagascar I frequently met people from Fisakana serving time in government jobs in far-flung corners of the country. One evening on the *taxi-brousse* from Antananarivo to Fandriana I was entertained throughout a long, dark and breakdown-ridden journey by the comic dialogue of two rather drunken clerks returning home for Christmas. 'Fisakana,' said one, 'is the engine of the government. If all the people born in Fisakana who work in the government went on strike at the same time, the country would grind to a halt.' There was general agreement at this amongst the passengers. 'What do you mean?' quipped the man's friend, 'it already has.'

There are two important points to note about the nature of educational success and professional employment amongst the northern Betsileo. Firstly, as the conversation reported above suggests,

it is the sheer number of Fisakana natives employed in government service which is striking. Clearly this had a huge effect on the demography of the region. Secondly, it should be noted that most of the educated emigres of Fisakana were absorbed into the lower and middle strata of the professional cadre. Although there were notable success stories, such as a professor at the Sorbonne and the occasional army general, the professions of schoolteacher and doctor provided the staple employment.

This can be illustrated if we look at the employment history of some prominent Ambohipo families over three generations during the twentieth century. They did not earn great salaries, but they were considerably richer than their peasant counterparts. First, the family of Ravophilippe. Ravophilippe was born in Ambohipo in about 1910 and educated at the Catholic mission school in the village. He eventually became a teacher at the prestigious Collège des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes in Antananarivo, where his position and salary enabled him to educate his four sons. Two became schoolteachers, one a dentist, the other a vet. The vet later became mayor of Milamaina, and his ten children all passed their baccalauréat. His elder brother, one of the two schoolteachers, saw 11 of his 12 children succeed in the same examination. One of them was director of Milamaina secondary school during my fieldwork.

Another example is the family of Rapiera and Ramarceline, contemporaries of Ravophilippe, and at the time the wealthiest couple in the village due to the number of inherited ricefields each brought into their marriage. One of their sons, Rakotosolofo, was described to me as a 'famous' schoolteacher who worked all over Madagascar. Eight of Rakotosolofo's 14 children became schoolteachers, scattered in lycées across the country: Toliara, Fianarantsoa, Ambositra, Fandriana, Antananarivo, Mahajanga, Antsohihy. One, Rajosefa, married the grand-daughter of Ravophilippe; when I lived in Ambohipo the couple both taught at Milamaina secondary school where their son was the pupil who always came top of his class.

The above two families were both descended from the Catholic branch of the Twelve Men, but the Lutherans too found success through the classroom. Ravalitera Samoela was of the same generation as Ravophilippe, Rapiera and Ramarceline. The son of a civil servant, he studied at the Lutheran Mission school in Ambohipo and then at a government technical college where he trained as a nurse. This led to employment in Ambositra and Toliara. At some point the family acquired a concession to exploit timber in the forest, which accounts both for the fine wooden staircases in their houses in Ambohipo and for the fact that Ravalitera Samoela could afford to educate his nine children. This education took them into a variety of professions: the mining service, the post office, the tax office; one son even rose to become Deputy Director of the Ministry of Education, from which office he ensured that no teacher from Ambohipo ever had to accept an isolated or inconvenient posting. The professional careers taken up by Ravalitera Samoela's nine children left them scattered throughout the island, making a break with the village which continued into the next generation: of his 34 grandchildren only one still lived in Ambohipo at the time of my fieldwork. Had he not been forced to drop out of lyc ee when his girlfriend became pregnant, he too might have left the village like his cousins.

Dispersal was not the only consequence of colonial education. Although most of the professional careers taken up by the sons and daughters of Ambohipo were not highly remunerated, these people still became rich in relation to those who earned their living from agriculture in the *tanindrazana*. Money brought into the village from the outside created a visible degree of economic differentiation. This was most noticeable in the houses built by *ampielezana*. Old people whom I talked to in Ambohipo remembered a time when nearly all the houses were mud-walled with thatched rooves, except for a few old houses made entirely of wood, which dated from the time that the village was closer to the forest. By the end of the twentieth century the only mud and thatch houses in Ambohipo belonged to the descendants of slaves. Most were built of brick with balconies, and rooves of tile or

corrugated iron. This change in style was attributed to the fact that *ampielezana* who lived in Antananarivo became used to the comforts of large brick houses, and could not be expected to put up with cramped and unsophisticated rural dwellings.

Post-independence Sahamadio

The histories of those three Ambohipo families over several generations have taken us seamlessly to the end of the twentieth century. Forty years have passed since the end of the colonial age that educated and selected villagers for the role in its administration. We must recover some of that ground.

In the village I was told very little of the transition to independence in Sahamadio, although it was still in living memory. This could be because at first very little changed. The abiding memory was that the government built a new iron bridge over the Imalaza at Miadanimerina to replace the wooden one destroyed in a cyclone. The new bridge was opened by the minister for heavy works, Monsieur Lechat, one of two Frenchmen in the post-independence government. This was part of a deliberate strategy to make the handover of power smooth and gradual. For many it was too gradual. The retention of Frenchmen in cabinet posts, and in influential positions as ‘technical assistants’ rankled with many nationalists.

In Ambohipo, the young and ambitious Rapaoly built his Development School with money won in a lawsuit when he sued the government for unfair dismissal from his vet’s job near Morondava. Building the school was an opportunistic move on his part. The Catholic mission school had only recently closed down, and the mayor intended his school to provide Catholic parents with an alternative to the Lutheran mission. For a while it was successful. But due to financial wranglings in the family, and to the provision in the 1970s of free state education in Ambohipo under the Second Republic, the school was forced to close. It became the subject of a lawsuit, never re-opened, and was left to stand empty and crumbling with iron sheeting nailed over the windows. It is an ugly reminder of an amazing

piece of history: that there was a time in this isolated third world village when a man could build a three-storey concrete school and immediately fill its classrooms with pupils and teachers drawn from that very neighbourhood. Such was the passion for schooling.

As independent Madagascar found its post-colonial footing, this passion continued in Sahamadio, indeed throughout the highlands. Education became a focal issue in the popular uprisings which overthrew President Tsiranana in 1972. The education system was attacked for not having shaken off the colonial legacy: eighty per cent of secondary school teachers were French in the years after independence (Covell 1987:38), and the curriculum was almost the same as that taught in France. Education was vilified as an organ of the privileged classes and at the same time hailed as the emancipator of the masses. As in the *événements* of May 1968 in Paris, it was students who were at the forefront of the protests.

In many senses it was the Second Republic which brought independence to Madagascar. Ratsiraka's policy of *fanagasiana* (Malgachisation) strove to attenuate cultural and economic links with France, to create a Malagasy sense of national identity, and to find new allies in the post-colonial world order. In the classroom, *fanagasiana* meant that Malagasy replaced French as the language of instruction, and the metropolitan curriculum was re-oriented towards subjects of greater relevance and meaning to post-colonial students. The country's new allies were the Soviet Union and North Korea, whose technical advisors were brought in to replace those of the departing French. However, the bulk of economic aid still came from France.

As a further means of placating the clamouring students, the education system was dramatically expanded. Channelling a massive 26% of the national budget into education (Covell 1987:65), Ratsiraka's policy of *manantona ny vahoaka ny sekoly* ('bringing the school to the people') aimed to provide each *fokontany* (the smallest administrative unit) with a state primary school, and each *firaisam-pokontany* (group of *fokontany*) with a secondary school. In a heavily

populated region such as Fisakana, this meant providing a primary school in almost every village larger than a hamlet. In Ambohipo, the Lutheran mission school closed and re-opened as a state primary school, an arrangement described by the pastor as 'a kind of borrowing' (*karazam-pindramana*). An agricultural lycée opened at Miadanimerina. A secondary school was built to serve Ambohipo, Milamaina, and other smaller villages. So as not to favour either of the two main villages, the school was sited on a distant hilltop where access was equally inconvenient for everybody.

Higher education also received investment. The number of university students increased from 6000 in 1972 to 20,000 in 1979 (Brown 1995:337), but nevertheless higher education could barely absorb the growing intake from below. The problem was partially resolved by the Soviet Union, which offered sponsored placements at its own universities. Numerous Malagasy and black Africans spent six years in cold and remote corners of the crumbling state qualifying for degrees, which would later prove worthless. One such was Naivobal of the wealthy Lutheran family the Ravaliteras. Unable to find work as a chemical engineer, his post-university days were spent angling in the irrigation channels of Sahamadio.

The huge investment in primary and secondary education was matched by a growth in the public sector. The civil service almost doubled its staff in the years 1972-78. Many of these state employees were teachers. At this time there were about 40 natives of Ambohipo working at various levels of the national school system. They were scattered all over the island, and due to the poor state of the roads and the cost of transport, many did not return home for years. Although wages fell over this period, the cost of living remained low. The price of rice was heavily subsidised by the state, allowing urban migrants to live reasonably in Antananarivo.

In 1978, however, the government set out on a programme of grand development schemes. These were hopelessly ambitious and unrealistically elaborated. Plants were built, dams were constructed, and high-tech machinery was bought. All of these projects were

funded by foreign loans. It was a time of 'outrageous investment and omnidirectional debt' (Covell 1987:63). Crippled by loans that could not be honoured, the economy was soon in a state of insolvency. By 1987 Madagascar had foreign debts amounting to US\$ 1 billion (Brown 1995:334). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) stepped in to impose austerity measures, one of which was a drastic cutback in government spending. Civil service salaries, slowly falling since 1972, were unable to keep pace with inflation, which had risen to 27%. Hardest hit were the low-level bureaucrats and schoolteachers with families to support in urban centres. Their lifestyle changed from reasonable comfort to near poverty. The IMF removed state subsidies on rice. Imported goods - now only available at inflated black-market prices due to IMF quotas - became unaffordable. It was an era of shabby penury for the middle classes.

This had a knock-on effect in the countryside. The educated urban elite of places such as Sahamadio no longer had surplus income to invest in their native villages. The artificially low price of rice in town made farmers reluctant to produce a surplus. These factors led to a fall in agricultural production. In order to reduce public spending, the government withdrew funding from rural areas. Fandriana became almost inaccessible by road as the once-paved Route Nationale 41 disintegrated into potholes. Pressure grew on land as the population continued to rise.

Although high-quality education was still available, and embraced by the people of Fisakana, their traditional source of employment - the civil service - had been downsized by the IMF's austerity measures, and was no longer able to absorb them. At the same time the government restructured the baccalauréat examination, enabling unsuccessful candidates to retake the same year rather than repeating their final year, as before. While this took the pressure off the lycées, it had the effect of overcrowding the universities. One young man in Ambohipo failed his baccalauréat ten times - that is, twice a year for five years - before he gave up and withdrew to a

solitary life chopping firewood in the village. He was the only one of 13 siblings not to become a schoolteacher.

By 1984 there were 40,000 students enrolled at six regional universities (Brown 1995:337). Resources were stretched to the limit. This era of continued educational opportunity was undermined by the shrinking of the job market. Many university graduates returned to Sahamadio, where they made their living from agriculture. Among the university-educated villagers when I lived in Ambohipo were Alexis, a qualified physical education instructor, and his wife Lydie, who had a degree in economics. Alexis put his education and qualification to good use by acting as referee in inter-village football matches. The couple supported their three children - and put them through school - on what they could make from farming. The situation was the same for many of their generation, including Naivobal, the Soviet-trained chemical engineer.

However, the increasingly impoverished situation of Madagascar, and of Ambohipo in particular, was also to be its partial salvation. Assistance from outside the island came in the form of foreign aid for the purposes of development, much of it provided by non-governmental organisations. This aid was mostly targeted at rural populations, but it required educated Malagasy to implement and administer it.

In Ambohipo, this need was identified by Léonard . He came from a peasant family with no tradition of education. He won himself a scholarship to agricultural college, found work as an agricultural engineer, and within five years he was head of the richest and most dynamic rural development NGO working in Madagascar. He travelled abroad and made contacts, attracting funds from the United States and Europe, which he used to fund a network of projects throughout the island. He did not neglect his own village. He brought piped water to Ambohipo. At one time his organisation employed forty-one people from Ambohipo, as technical assistants, secretaries, drivers and engineers. His earning power enabled him to put his younger brothers and sisters through school and university. He built

two houses for himself in the village. After some years he left the NGO and founded his own company specialising in development training and exporting fair-trade handicrafts.

The economic climate had changed, and with it the sources of power and influence to which education could give access. Léonard's success lay in his realisation that the money had gone out of government service and that foreign aid was the new capital. Rather like his ancestor, Andriamarovala, who introduced rice cultivation to Sahamadio, Léonard was the first to spot a new opportunity and to convert it into a source of wealth and prestige. Other educated people from the area followed Léonard into development. It became common in the 1990s to see four-wheel-drive vehicles in the valley. On the occasion that the Lutheran church celebrated its 125th anniversary, I counted ten cars parked in the school playground where normally there were none. Half of these were expensive off-road vehicles with green registration plates indicating that they belonged to foreign NGOs and were being borrowed for the weekend.

One result of the structural adjustment policies imposed by the IMF was the spread of private business initiatives. The mayor of Fandriana made a fortune in recycled paper, much of which he sold back to his constituents in the form of exercise books - a commodity in great demand in Fisakana. Although based in Antananarivo, he regularly visited Fandriana in his helicopter, and once loaned it to the regional government in the battle against swarming locusts. Further down the valley in Miadanimerina, another enterprising businessman and prominent local politician invested in a hydro-electric scheme. A small turbine under the iron bridge at Imalaza produced a power supply to Miadanimerina, Fandriana and the roadside villages along the valley of Sahamadio. In the dry season, when the river water was needed to irrigate the ricefields, the electricity would dwindle to less than candlelight.

The presence of electricity in the valley would seem to suggest a degree of wealth. But as with the big houses and the four-wheel-drive vehicles, it was a luxury only available to part of the population.

Electricity was only connected to those households who could afford it. The majority of Ambohipo's houses were lit by oil lamps. The cars and electricity and big houses masked the fact that the rural population had steadily been growing poorer over the course of the twentieth century. Varaine's figures for 1949 show one ox for every two head of population and a surplus of locally produced rice. When I lived in Ambohipo there were only 26 cattle in the village, which then had a population of 260; large amounts of rice were imported because the rural population had outstripped the valley's production capacity. Whereas the young exile born on a windy hilltop had descended into the valley to find wealth and abundance, now the young people sought their prosperity beyond the valley, particularly through the school.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I stated that it was not my purpose to provide a history of Fisakana. Nevertheless, by collating various accounts - ancestral, missionary, colonial, academic - of the region's, the valley's and the village's past, I hope to have made a minor contribution to our understanding of the area's development from its earliest inhabitation to the end of the twentieth century. I have gathered a set of stories about the past; I have not recounted the past itself. Many voices have been omitted: women hardly feature in the ancestral narratives, and these stories were never told to me by women; the descendants of slaves appear as incidental actors in the stories of the free - they are largely 'people without history'. So my purpose could never be to capture the past, far less to explain it. Instead I have tried to use different accounts of the past available to me to put into historical context the major issues of the thesis. The jigsaw assembled above is therefore not a history of the past, but a history of the present (Foucault 1977:31).

I wish now briefly to identify some of these themes, as we shall see them recurring throughout the thesis. There is the theme of migration, with which the chapter opened, as Randriamahalefitra was exiled from his home on the hilltop to become the valley's first settler

and pioneer farmer. While he migrated out of necessity, his younger brother followed him out of desire. These twin impetuses will feature throughout, and are examined in detail in Chapter Three. Particularly important in this discussion of migration is the social and economic relationship of educated migrants to their ancestral land.

There is the theme of wealth and how to acquire it. The story of Andriamarovala, who grew rich by introducing rice cultivation to the valley and then lost a vital goose on the way to register as *andriana*, raises two issues that pervade this thesis. Firstly, it shows the importance of knowledge as a commodity: trading in his cattle for seed, Andriamarovala embraced the new technology of rice cultivation, and used the profits to buy more livestock. Secondly, the story shows the connection between wealth and ritual status. It was Andriamarovala's wealth of livestock that nearly bought him his elevated ritual status of *andriana*. Ultimately, the lost goose cost him status only in his lifetime. It was his wealth and renown that made him a venerable and long-remembered ancestor in his death. Chapters Four and Five look more closely at how such ancestors are made.

There is the theme of the role in socio-economic differentiation of external spheres of influence. The opportunistic conversions to Catholicism that characterised the early colonial period were largely the result of a desire by local people to access the power and influence of the French state. The passion for brick houses in Fandriana, which followed the first missionary's example, shows the influence of European taste on local style. The wealth and property achievable through access to global markets of aid and finance in the late twentieth century could not contrast more strongly with the poverty of those people tied to the tired land. As we shall see, money, knowledge and influence from outside the valley could be translated into ritual status within it.

And there is the theme of the school. This chapter has briefly exposed the school in its changing role as a tool of faith, as an agent of government coercion, as a producer of civil servants, as a propagator of Malagasy nationalism. But the wider aim of the thesis is to examine

the role of this essentially foreign presence as creator of socio-economic and hence ritual differentiation in the village itself. We will see the part played by this most un-local and un-ancestral of agents in the ritual economy of the land of the ancestors.

But it is with migration that we start.

Chapter Three

Migration

Movement

Many years ago, long before the first named ancestors, Randriamahalefitra and Andriamilanja, planted the first rice and sweet potatoes, the valley of Sahamadio lay undiscovered and dormant under a canopy of virgin forest. Already shrinking under natural wastage, slowly this forest fell prey to the expansion and exploitation of a human population in search of arable land. The once thick cover of trees receded like melting snow; the exposed valley sides were chiselled into terraces; the narrow valley bottom became a wide plain of dyked fields; houses and tombs appeared on its banks. The ancient treescape had disappeared forever under the axe and the spade, the earth had been laid bare as a human population moved in and settled and cultivated....and multiplied.

Those early Betsileo, before they were known as such, had come out of the forest, and as they settled, multiplied and re-shaped the valley, the forest slowly came out of them. Berries gave way to rice, wild boar to beef. They were colonists, colonising and exploiting the new country as they in turn would later be colonised by the Merina and the French. They became the quintessential sedentary rice farmers: experts in irrigation, developers of land, transformers of landscape. But although their agriculture was sedentary, it must not be assumed that they were static. Land is a finite resource and can only support a certain population. So sedentary cultivators must move on to survive, leaving behind the fields of their forebears. As their ancestors had come from elsewhere in search of land, so their descendants would also, slowly, over generations, move on and away.

This had perhaps never been so evident, so necessary, as it was in the last days of the twentieth century. The whole of the valley was under cultivation, parcelled up into plots of rice, manioc, groundnuts, maize, sweet potatoes, pineapples. Only the crowns of the hills

retained a covering of pasture, saved from the spade by their value to cattle and their position above the spring line. Thus there was practically no land left to develop. I once came across a pair of women digging into one of the huge cross dykes that traversed the valley, making a tiny extra ricefield where none ought to have been. This was a dyke built two centuries before by communal labour, now eroding under individual expediency. Such was the pressure on land.

There was, and is, a further problem for the people of Sahamadio: not only is land scarce, it is scarcely fertile. The soil is thin and loose, being dusty and sandy when dry, yet cloying and obdurate when wet. Without fertiliser only manioc thrives, and even then at one third of the rate it grows in other areas of the island. As a result of this, those people who could afford to own cattle had an agricultural advantage over others, for in Sahamadio the value of cattle lay not so much in their meat or milk or muscle, as in their muck. When I lived in Ambohipo only four families had enough liquid capital to buy cattle; poorer families relied on pigs, rabbits and chickens for their manure.

So the problem was twofold: poor land and not enough of it. Sahamadio was settled space, which had become over-settled. The days of plenty had given way to days of poverty, as over the generations plots were divided and subdivided amongst heirs, and the sandy red soil became exhausted of its nutrients. Like seeds, the children of Sahamadio are scattered far and wide, seeking space to prosper.

One evening on the balcony of Radada's house, Kaneny, Kola and I counted Ambohipo's residents, visiting in our minds every house in the village. The two girls named the people who lived there and I kept a running total. It was easy and took about ten minutes: it came to 254. Then we tried to count those who had left; again we went round the houses. But this was much harder: Romaine's house stood empty and the girls could not remember how many children he had, named one or two and then got stuck; I looked in my kinship notebook and counted nine emigrant children. Kola started counting her own family,

the aunts and cousins who had gone out west to farm, but she could not quite remember how many - she was only twelve and they were long gone. Only two of Kaneny's ten siblings were still in the village. Of Radaniel's twelve surviving sons only three remained. We gave up. The emigrants were simply too numerous and disparate to count. We estimated that there must have been twice as many departed as remained behind, but it was only a guess and I felt that not only could the girls not count, but they would not count. Whilst it was taken for granted that their kin and co-villagers had left, this was not something that they wished to dwell upon. Kola was amazed. I think it was the first time that the emigrant nature of her village had really struck her. After all the mental activity of counting, a moment of calm reflection came over us as we sat in the evening sun, quietly shelling groundnuts, thinking of all those who had gone, of those who sometimes came home, and of those who never would.

I have stated that the people of Sahamadio were accustomed to migration: they had come from elsewhere and would move off elsewhere. These people had always moved; they had ways of dealing with, and talking about, movement, migration and the distancing of kin. But I also wish to underline that the nature of that migration has changed in recent years. This is a crucial dimension of this thesis, for it is linked to social differentiation and education. Whilst the valley was originally settled by a slow westerly drift in search of land, more recent emigrations had been over greater distances and in greater numbers. They are of two types. Firstly, there has been long-distance agricultural migration. For some years the government has been encouraging peasants from highly populated areas of the highlands to resettle in the mid western area of the island. This is a spacious and fertile area, though isolated. It has attracted pioneers from throughout Madagascar (Raison 1984), even some from Ambohipo, as we saw in Chapter One. Migration to the mid west was generally characterised by a sudden and often definitive break with the ancestral homeland. Secondly, the involvement of a large part of Sahamadio's population in formal schooling, and consequently in non-agricultural professions,

has led to the creation of unprecedented inequalities of wealth. The urban nature of that migration and the spending-power of the migrants have brought about new relationships with the *tanindrazana*. These new relationships are discussed at length in the next two chapters. This chapter will discuss these three patterns of migration by relating the lived experience of people from Ambohipo to other studies of migration in Madagascar. The new relationships produced through education-inspired migration can only be fully understood in relationship to the other two forms: recent long-haul removal to the mid west, and the slow migratory shift which brought about the early settlement of the valley.

The wandering Betsileo

For anyone who does not appreciate the centrality of migration to Malagasy society, Hubert Deschamps' *Les Migrations Intérieures à Madagascar* (1959) is essential reading. For anyone intrigued, as I am, by the relentless itinerancy of the Malagasy people, the book is wholly captivating. Deschamps spends nearly 300 pages, covering 1500 years, detailing the obscure meanderings of ancient clans, the progressive expansions of whole peoples, the seasonal wanderings of labourers. Not even the stability of sedentary rice cultivation, he says, prevents a latent nomadism from taking apparently settled Malagasy off on further migrations. Finally, he throws up his hands, as if exasperated at their sheer restlessness, and exclaims in italics: '*Toujours nous trouvons le mouvement*' (1959:247).

In a way, the book tells us more about the history of the island than does Deschamps' own *Histoire de Madagascar* (1972). For the history of the Malagasy - who, of course, themselves came from elsewhere - is one of continuous migration and mobility, dispersal and diaspora. In fact the study was commissioned as part of a colonial initiative aimed at harnessing this migratory propensity in order to counteract labour shortages. It is unsurprising, then, that in so large an island there is such unity of language, practice and belief. In the context of this continual movement, ancestors and ancestral lands are

key reference points - both for the Malagasy and for those who attempt their ethnography.

The Betsileo have an established migratory pedigree. Deschamps places them in his top five most migratory Malagasy peoples (1959:ch 1). He describes them as semi-nomadic, as pioneers, as conquerors of virgin territory (1959:246). The people who settled Fisakana - and who later became known as the northern Betsileo - certainly fit that description, for they populated one of the last wildernesses of the highlands. As we saw in Chapter Two, Ratsimbazafimahefa (1971) makes an important contribution to the history of Fisakana by uncovering the various 'couches culturelles' that constituted the population of this 'zone de confluence'. Detailed and revealing as his analysis is, it gives the false impression of populations moving into the area to settle. This was no doubt their intention, but what I want to stress here is that in the long term these populations were not simply moving *into* Fisakana - they were moving *through* it. I will demonstrate this below. The propensity of these people to head for the open spaces of the mid west, and to transform the valleys of Betsioboka, confirms that they had not lost these qualities in the twentieth century.

But their recent migration has also been much more mundane, particularly as the demands of the monetary economy have required wage labour for cash returns. Deschamps records Betsileo working outside their *tanindrazana* as sawyers, brickmakers, masons and agricultural labourers (1959:110). Of all the Betsileo regions it was Fisakana that contributed most to this pool of migrant labour, because there was simply not enough land to support the people. In 1957 the population of Fisakana was rising at a rate of 3.2%, due to double by 1982. With 40% of the population under 16, Deschamps predicted that without migration there would surely be famine in Fisakana, such were the 'impossible' conditions of life. 'If the Betsileo peasant finds land to go to,' he predicted, 'he will certainly not hesitate - if pressed by necessity and incited by examples of success - to take up definitive emigration again' (1959:112-4).

Of course, Deschamps was right: by the late twentieth century, forty years after this prediction, half the population of Ambohipo had left for good.

A slow migration westward

In concentrating on the acceleration in the rate of migration in the twentieth century, we must not forget that the imperative for movement has always been part of the history of the population of Fisakana. In Chapter Two we saw how the ancestral history of the Twelve Men opened with the departure of the ill-starred Randriamahalefitra from the village of his birth. His journey of exile is described as epic and terrible. 'He set off to the west without even a dog or a wild pig for company, without firewood or dry rice to his name. He went wherever fate took him in this world of tears, buffeted by the waves of life on this sea of suffering, and he came down to Milamaina near Antoko.' What the narrator does not tell us - because he has in mind an audience familiar with Sahamadio's geography - is that Randriamahalefitra's epic journey covered all of a mile and a half. Randriamahalefitra had gone down one hill, up another, down into the next valley.....and stopped there.

In terms of other migrations in Sahamadio, Randriamahalefitra's was long-distance. It took nearly another hundred years for his descendants to cross the next valley. But the point is that they did. Slowly, gradually, impelled by the gentle momentum of their own multiplication, they spread their way westwards, opening new land, founding new villages, and building new tombs.

The past: hilltop and forest

So for the people of Ambohipo, the past lay to the east. And the distant past was to be found high on the fortified ancestral hilltops where Randriamahalefitra's story had begun. From Radolphe's balcony in Ambohipo you could just see the ditches of the old village standing rugged on the blue horizon two valleys to the east. In the

days of fighting and raiding, this was where his ancestors had lived. I really wanted to go there, and I wanted him to come too. Eventually he agreed, as my fieldnotes recount below.

I have been saying for some time how I want to go to Vohitsoa to see where the ancestors came from. I am hoping Radada will come with me and Théo. First he will, then he changes his mind: he has too much to do. But on Friday morning, after feeding the pigs, the three of us walk out of the house together - on a journey into the past.

Down through the peanut fields at the eastern side of Ambohipo and then across the dykes of the rice plain. We pass groups of women from Miarinavaratra, bringing their mats from the east to trade against our early rice. We climb up the cart track past Vohimalaza, into the cool pine wood at the top of the first ridge.

People we pass ask us where we are going, but we just say 'this way' or 'over here', never committing ourselves to precision. Théo asks me why I think this is. Rasoa once told me, so I tell him that it is because people who know where we are going might want to meddle with our plans by bewitching us.

'Is that right, Radada?'

'In case we get bewitched, eh? It might be.' He laughs. He never tells me much - just watches me learning for myself. Like a child. Like his son.

From the top of the ridge we drop down steeply through thin pasture and trees, stopping to gather handfuls of bilberries. Past Raedy's house - we shout up to the balcony but there's nobody in - and into another valley bottom where we ford the brook and pull sharply up the embankment through the tall yellow rice until we reach Raimboa's veranda.

We call from the yard and he comes down. A nephew of Radada by an elder sister, he is only a few years younger than his uncle. Late middle age, a blue knitted hat on his head and a fur-lined anorak worn inside-out. His daughter stands swinging her newborn child in her arms. Radada has brought some seeds in a plastic bag which he gives to Raimboa. He explains how to plant them. Raimboa's wife takes them safely away to the grain store. Radada says we are going to Vohitsoa. Does Raimboa know the way? Yes, he

will take us. We look up at our destination, high up on the ridge above us, an almost vertical climb. 'It must be twenty years since I went up there,' says Raimboa.

We climb, on steep narrow paths round the edge of terraced fields. Some boys are grazing cows on a grassy bank between the manioc fields, some men are digging a field. We stop and greet them. Our pace is quick, twisting up through the bushes and between the fields. Raimboa's grown-up son, Rakoto, catches us up: he doesn't want to miss out.

As we approach the top of the hill there is a patch of pasture. Then the first ditch. We walk into it through an opening. It is dark green and overgrown with old hardwood trees such as are seen no more in the valley. Radada identifies a bush with large blue berries - ox eye. The ground is cool and damp, like a little forest.

We pass through five or six concentric ditches until suddenly we are on the flat top of the hill, a large space opening before us. We walk across this space and find the outline of the square, the sacred square used for village meetings, just shown by four low lines of stone. There are no signs of houses.

Raimboa points to a pile of stone and rock. 'There's the old tomb.'

'Are the ancestors still there?'

'They might be, but they've probably been moved.'

At one corner of the square is a hole, about six foot deep and wide enough to stand in. We wonder about it.

'Maybe they ripened bananas in it.'

'Did they have bananas then?'

'Yes, there was forest all around here. All forest.'

'No ricefields?'

'They lived on beef and berries.'

'What kind of berries?'

'Forest berries. There were lots of berries and they knew how to live off them and how to make medicine. You see that flower. You can use it for medicine. Fever medicine.

We have moved to the edge of the old village and are sitting overlooking the steep terraced valley out of which we have climbed. Below is an intricate pattern of fields linking into one

another's shapes, signalling in colour their differing ripenesses.

We are still thinking of the old days.

'They must have sat here, two thousand years ago, watching the sun set.'

'On this rock. It's a good place to sit.'

Théo and Rakoto have gone off and are gathering dry grass and sticks. They want to make a fire to smoke the bats out of the cave in the cliff. The two old men stay talking.

When we have sat for a long while and the bats have not come out - just stayed in squeaking at the smoke - we decide to leave. On the way back down through the ditches Rakoto stops and selects a stout hardwood tree. He hacks it down with the machete he has brought. Then he strips the limbs and the bark revealing the shiny green of the sap. This will make a good pestle for pounding rice. This is the wood the ancestors used. Hard wood, from the forest.

We wind back down the steep bank through the shrub to Raimboa's house where his wife has cooked us a lunch of egg and rice. Leaving yesterday behind we join today once more.

I have included this account of the Vohitsoa excursion as an illustration of the relationship between history and migration, time and space, for the people whose ancestors had covered those few miles. The past was on the hilltop. The past was the forest. The past was back east.

Betsileo houses, and tombs, look west, into the setting sun. Approached from the west, the houses of a Betsileo village gaze at you like a crowd of faces in unison, their backs turned on the east. There are never doors, and rarely are there windows, in the eastern walls, for this is said to be the sign of a witch.

I had read of Betsileo beliefs about the symbolic characteristics of east and west - the former being blue, kind and ancestral, the latter red, dangerous and powerful (Hébert 1965; Vig 1977). When I asked people about the orientation of buildings, I expected these beliefs to be voiced. But people simply told me it was that facing west catches the afternoon sun, and this brings welcome warmth to both the living and the dead.

Ambohipo's first settlers came from the east. But despite this connection, the people of Ambohipo had a cautious, even suspicious, attitude to the forest. Like their houses, they seemed to turn their backs on it, as their long-term migrations looked ever westward. They disliked the forest physically, economically and socially. Yet their lives still referred to it.

There is a curious saying known to everyone from the Fandriana region that 'people born in Fisakana are not eaten by crocodiles'. I was told the story behind this saying, a similar version of which can also be found in Ratsimbazafimahefa (1971). In the days before Fandriana, Miadanimerina was the big market town in the area, but there was no bridge over the River Imalaza. Many people coming to market were eaten by the crocodiles. So the people brought a *mpimasy* (diviner) from the Betsimisaraka in the forest to deal with the problem. He made a fire by the river and heated up a spear until it was red hot. He uttered spells. Then he tied a lamb to the bank. When it bleated, a crocodile emerged from the swirling depths. As it opened its mouth to eat the lamb, the *mpimasy* plunged his burning spear into its mouth. Thenceforth the crocodiles lost their appetite for the people of Fisakana.

There is a coda to this story. Worried that the *mpimasy* might one day reverse his spell and expose them to danger again, some people ambushed him on his way home and killed him. In revenge, the *mpimasy*'s family ordered that however much the Betsileo of Fisakana might prosper from working in the forest, their savings would all be wasted and would come to nothing when they got back home.

Many people from Sahamadio did go into the forest to seek their fortunes, but it was said they never came back rich. The work was hard and unrewarding. Physically the landscape is dense, damp, closed in. The people of Fisakana preferred the more open, ordered and irrigated vistas of their rice valleys. Their migrations are largely westward onto the rolling treeless highland plains. When young men from Ambohipo went into the forest, they complained of the difficulty of the paths, their narrowness, slipperiness, treachery. As a young

man, Radolphe drove cattle through the forest to sell to the Betsimisaraka; he would lose ten out of every seventy to cliff-top falls and exhaustion. Walking in the forest is a tough art, an ingrained practice of the tough people that live there. Even when they emerged from the forest to trade at Betsileo markets, the forest dwellers were recognisable, not for their features, but for their way of walking in straight, ordered, single file - tallest at the front, smallest at the back. To the amusement of the Betsileo, they walked like this even in the broad streets of Fandriana, accustomed as they were to the confines of the wood.

The impenetrability of the forest has always kept the state at bay. The Merina never really controlled it, nor did the French. Remote towns such as Ambodivoara lie beyond the clutches of the law today and, due to their isolation and a good supply of sugar cane, have become centres of illegal distillation. In these dank forest towns, great stills of cane juice sit bubbling slowly over hardwood fires, which leave the taste of their smoke in the the sharp, clear, overproof rum that is renowned throughout the island. The northern Betsileo adore this rum. Ambodivoara (the name of both the town and the rum) is a by-word for a Betsileo passion - a passion, which, like the Betsileo themselves, has roots in the forest, but whose life lies outside of it.

Despite its provenance in the forest, rum was an integral part of the economy and identity of Fisakana. Every week two young men went from Ambohipo to the forest to buy rum to sell in the village on market day. Buses from Fandriana were routinely searched by the gendarmes for supplies heading for Antananarivo, where rum fetched twice the country price. The Betsileo drank Ambodivoara in huge quantities, calling it, in opposition to wine, beer or legally distilled liquor, 'the rum of the ancestors'. It was de rigeur at any ancestral ceremony. Many drank more than is good for them. During my fieldwork I heard of at least ten people in the valley who died from drinking rum - some lost their livers and stomach linings, others simply misjudged the strength and never woke up in the morning. These sudden deaths were always put down to malevolent interference

by a third party - never to alcohol poisoning. Despite such deaths, rum was still celebrated, and drunkenness indulged. There is a saying: 'The Betsileo is not behaving badly, it is just that the rum is strong' (*Ny Betsileo tsa maditra fa ny toaka ro mahery*). The forest rum was potent, unpredictable, fundamental to ritual and social life, life-affirming, life-threatening and dangerous. In such ways it was very much like the ancestors themselves.

The ambiguity of this relationship between the northern Betsileo and their rum was echoed in their relationship with the forest. The forest was a source of wealth, whilst, intrinsically and unavoidably, it was a source of danger. Many of the poorer, usually landless, villagers from Ambohipo spent the dry season labouring for wages as field hands for the Tanala. The Tanala, unlike the Betsileo, are not subsistence farmers, but derive much of their income from cash-crops such as coffee and sugar cane. They bring in the Betsileo to do what the Betsileo do best - tend the rice fields.

People from Ambohipo who had been in to the forest to work for the Tanala described them as rich and lazy. One woman from Amboasary went with her husband in November, at the height of the dry season, but fell gravely ill with a fever. She believed she had been poisoned by a jealous Tanala girlfriend of her husband. She came home to seek treatment from a Betsileo *mpimasy*, but he could not save her. Her only child, which she had left in the care of her mother, died two weeks later from diarrhoea. The fact that many seasonal migrants died of such fevers was proof, in Betsileo eyes, that the Tanala are expert poisoners.

So while the people of Ambohipo distrusted and disliked the forest, and turned their backs on the east, at the same time they relied upon it for economic opportunity and as the source of their ritual lifeblood. The forest was a dark place of poison, death and danger, but it was also the home of their ancestors and their past. This was the crucial ambiguity in the relationship with the forest. It was perhaps not the actual physical dangers and discomforts which disturbed the Betsileo about the forest, though these were real enough. Rather it was

the latent unease that to return to the east was, in a way, to return to the tomb, to a dark and enclosed space too close to the ancestors. This was perhaps why the northern Betsileo preferred, with their history and forebears behind them to the east, to face the open plains of the future, to look upon the new unbroken lands to the west where their offspring would settle and, in turn, send forth their own children into the setting sun.

East to west

This movement westwards is a feature of the highlands (Deschamps 1959:113). The same pattern of migration has been noted amongst Merina living near Arivonimamo, west of Antananarivo (Graeber 1996:193). The general trend of Bara migration is also westward. Hence the Bara associate the east with patrilineal ancestors, and the west with women and affines (Huntington 1988:49). The descendants of the Twelve Men in Ambohipo thought of themselves as keenly endogamous, although they had for generations intermarried with the descendants of Andriamilanja as both descent groups worked their way across the valley.

Ambohipo was born of this long intermarrying and slow expansion. It was descendants of Andriamilanja who dug the ox ditch - the mark of a settlement's foundation. They married with members of the Twelve Men descent group who opened up land to the south of the new village. When I lived in Ambohipo, the original ox ditch had become a lost suburb of greater Ambohipo, swamped by housing growth on three sides, and overgrown with eucalyptus. But were one to clear away the trees and the years, the houses inside that ditch would be clearly visible from Ambohitraivo, the village on the eastern edge of the valley whence the founders came. In this type of slow migration, the past is usually visible from the present. To glance to the east is to glance at the past.

Tsimihety migration is described by Molet (1959) and Wilson (1992) as unfolding with a languor similar to that of the Betsileo. Memorably, Molet compares Tsimihety movement to 'une tâche

d'huile' seeping gently across the landscape. Each new Tsimihety settlement lives through a three generation cycle: the first generation clears the land, the second consolidates and settles, and the third moves out and on (Molet 1959:57,112). This kind of constant movement develops into an evolving relationship between the migrants and their ancestral lands. As with the Betsileo, the tomb is always somewhere behind the migrants, in a place that was their past. With distance and time, the link can become attenuated.

Tombs and *tanindrazana*

The solution is to bring the tomb along too. For the slowly migrating Tsimihety, it takes about three generations before migrants stop burying in the old land, and build a tomb in the new (Wilson 1992:144). The Twelve Men founded their own tomb in Ambohipo soon after crossing the valley to settle. The link between the old tomb and the new was maintained by bringing the body of the ancestor Ralaizafy with them to inaugurate the new tomb. This practice is also followed by the Merina over their short-haul migrations. Graeber describes how tombs multiply as a father's sons move away to the west, found their own tombs, and then their descendants move on. Each tomb is linked to its predecessor by virtue of its having been inaugurated by the body of an ancestor taken from there. Thus the siting of the tombs, branching out across the hillsides, stands in the landscape as a simplified patriline of descent (Graeber 1996:193-4). This vision of an area dotted with related tombs is one conception of *tanindrazana*.

Despite this visible linkage, the building of a new tomb nevertheless entails considerable rupture. Razafindrason was a man from Sahamadio who moved to Vavavato, three hours walk to the west. Having been settled there for many years, he decided to build a tomb in his new land. He had some fields back in Sahamadio which were too distant to be practicable and too valuable to leave untended, so he sold these to Léonard - an educated migrant looking to buy land as an investment. With the money from the land sale Razafindrason

was able to build a tomb at Vavavato, and he brought an ancestor from Sahamadio with which to inaugurate it. In effect, Razafindrason had left his land behind, but taken his tomb with him. This is the tomb where he would be buried. For his children, Vavavato - not Sahamadio - would be the *tanindrazana*. In the space of a generation, the *tanindrazana* itself - in the sense of the locality of the family tomb - had migrated westward.

The point I am making is that *tanindrazana* is a very pliable concept. For far-flung migrants it might be a general area with a number of tombs, as in Graeber's model of a visible patriline. Amongst the status-conscious migrant Merina described by Bloch (1971:112), it is the first point of reference for interactions with others, and immediately places them in a hierarchy. For those who have moved nearby, *tanindrazana* might be a particular tomb in a particular village. And we must not forget that it could also refer quite specifically to ancestral *fields*.

Fields and *tanindrazana*

The rice plain of Sahamadio is a spectacular creation of the spade. The interlocked patternings of paddy fields fill the broad valley bottom and step their way up its banks and into its tributaries. Each field is bordered with a sturdy dyke, wide and strong enough to walk upon in single file. Down the side of each valley, large or small, the main water course is cut deep into the land to take the floods of rainy season downpours, while the fields themselves are irrigated by a gentle flow which trickles down the staircase from top to bottom.

The human landscaping of the valley is a vast project achieved by two centuries of effort, ingenuity and engineering. No food matters to the Betsileo as much as rice, no land as much as ricefields. No fields lie fallow, no dykes untended. The hand-dug contours are clean, level lines of spadework which map the human progression up the hillsides. Crossing the main valley, itself about a quarter of a mile wide, at intervals of about 500 yards are a series of huge twelve-foot-high dykes. These great walls, lying like fallen giants in the valley

bottom, are there to keep the combined trickle from running away with itself and washing the fields away. These had been built, I was often told, by the communal toil of the ancestors for the benefit of the community at large - without them it would have been impossible to maintain the individual family fields that patterned the valley. The ancestors had formed and tended this land to feed their children. Their legacy lay in the landscape, which the people worked in and worked upon for themselves and for generations to come.

So the production of rice, and the creation and maintenance of the landscape were the result of both communal and individual strategies. The overall system of dykes and ditches, the flood channels and the flow retainers were the work of communal labour. Individual family fields, on the other hand, were the product of particular families' investment in the soil. People in Sahamadio related to their ancestral land on both of these levels. In both cases the relationship was infused with elements of sentiment and morality. But still this did not hold people to their land.

One word strongly associated with rice fields was *lova* - inheritance. This is because fields were the most important kind of inheritance. Houses were of little matter: people could, and did, build new houses all the time. Ricefields, on the other hand, were both a source of livelihood and the physical product of ancestral industry. As such, it was considered quite wrong to sell one's ancestral ricefields. In fact, I was told there was an ancestral prohibition on selling them. The presence of a prohibition is usually evidence of its violation, and there were several cautionary tales of people who had squandered their inheritance, selling off fields one-by-one to pay for the high life. Rakoto's aunt had sold her house and land at Maroharona, and had lived very well for two years on the proceeds. It was said that she ate meat every day - an unaffordable luxury for most country people. Then the money ran out. She was reduced to begging in the streets of Fandriana. This was described to me as both an object lesson in the foolishness of profligacy, and as evidence of ancestral displeasure.

The two people who independently told me this story both said they would not consider selling their inheritance. This was not just pious moralising for the sake of the anthropologist. At a personal emotional level, inherited fields were full of the associations of one's immediate family. The fields which Radolphe was happiest cultivating were those left to him by his father in a small tributary off the main valley. These fields had been created by the joint effort of father and son. They started by damming the brook on the hilltop and then caving in its sides with spades. Releasing the water washed away the brittle topsoil, leaving a muddy bank to be terraced, ditched and planted. Between them, Radolphe and his father had transformed pasture into paddy. He would never sell this land, he said, for it was full of his father's toil. This was a matter of personal morality for Radolphe, informed by a combination of memory, respect and kinship. His practical knowledge of rice growing had left its mark on the landscape, but the land had also left its mark on him. The sentimental attachment could also include an element of fear. Selling one's parents' fields risked parental displeasure, all the more virulent if they happened to be dead. The influence of recently deceased ancestors could be felt more keenly than that of the longer-dead, as Graeber (1995) has illustrated with regard to the Merina.

Nevertheless, when I looked closely at the land register, and made inquiries to individuals, I found inherited ricefields were continually being sold, and not just by irresponsible and prodigal individuals. The main reason for this was migration. The general prohibition against selling ancestral fields was hard to maintain when so many of the population were moving away - even if only very slowly. The estrangement of migration meant it was often impractical to continue cultivating land left behind to the east. It could also make it hard to maintain claims upon that land. Ralala owned a single field on the eastern side of the valley. It was rather inconvenient to cultivate, and she knew that her kin in that village begrudged her taking the harvest back to Ambohipo. It ought really to be eaten here, they said, since this is where the ancestors lived and are buried.

Similarly, Radolphe was inconvenienced by a field left to him on the eastern side. However, he managed to exchange it for one nearer to Ambohipo, where he lived. This entailed a severance, not just with that piece of land, but with those increasingly distant kin who he only ever used to see when visiting his field. Now even that frail link was broken. As we saw earlier, Razafindrason sold a field in Sahamadio in order to pay for a tomb in his new land to the west. As the purpose of the sale was to honour his ancestors, it was considered perfectly justifiable. This too involved the severance of an important connection with his *tanindrazana* - both in terms of ancestral tomb and ancestral fields.

People's relationship with ancestral fields also existed, as I have said, at a more general social level. The realisation of the huge hydraulic project which had created the ricebasin of Sahamadio was recognised to be the legacy of a communal ancestral effort. The flood channels down the valley side and the huge cross-dykes were what made the mosaic of small family fields viable. There, on the ground, lay the evidence of what could be achieved by co-operative endeavour. It was not an abstract notion, evoked through tales of yore, but a social fact witnessed in the very landscaping of the land. The rice-producing landscape was the result of an evolving ancestral interaction with the environment. As such it commanded awe and respect. It was held up as the realisation of the ideals of the society that existed in 'the time of the ancestors'. The landscape was laden with moral authority.

Rakoto-Ramariantsoa (1994) argues that for Merina peasants the labour of the ancestors, which they witness in the landscape, creates a permanent link between the living and the dead, and thereby confers upon that landscape a certain mystical dimension. This was true of the Betsileo of Sahamadio. The moral authority of the *tanindrazana* was not simply a result of the presence of dead ancestors living out the afterlife in tombs. It was also, crucially, a result of those ancestors' past interaction with - and creation of - the landscape which is their legacy. I analyse this relationship in detail in Chapter Six.

So to leave these ancestral fields was to abandon an ancestral environment and to forego the safety, protection and blessing of this ancestral legacy. Cole (1999) describes a similar situation amongst the Betsimisaraka of eastern Madagascar, who are torn between the desire for individual fulfilment outside the *tanindrazana* and the need for ancestral protection within it. Yet such was the pressure on land in Sahamadio that people often had no option but to leave. However strong the 'mystical dimension' of the relationship with the *tanindrazana*, it was not enough to feed one's family.

Desire for descendants

It was rare in Sahamadio for a set of siblings to inherit enough land to support them all. Also, as Bloch has pointed out for the Merina, the death of a patriarch usually leaves no single heir with the unilateral authority possessed by the father. This situation results in segmentation (Bloch 1971:90). Similarly, disputes over inheritance - and they were frequent in Sahamadio - would also lead to people moving away from their kin, and setting up new lives elsewhere.

But migration was not simply a reflex reaction to poverty or land shortage. It was particularly associated with young men at a stage in life when they were restless to make their own living as a prelude to marriage, stability and the fathering of descendants. This is what attracted Randriandamborodona, the younger brother of the exiled Randriamahalefitra in the ancestral story of the Twelve Men. Whilst his elder brother was compelled by destiny to leave his parents' village, the younger brother was impelled by desire. Attracted by the abundant harvests which his brother brought home from the new land, Randriandamborodona saw the potential to place with a line of his own descendants. He became the named founding ancestor of his own descent group.

The desire to be surrounded by descendants, noted also by Graeber (1996:213), Wooley (1998:76) and Astuti (2000:90), is necessarily hard to realise in the land of one's father. Firstly, there was unlikely to be much land. Secondly, any descendants of the son would

count as the father's. It was because he distanced himself from his own father that Randriandamborodona was able to found the descent group which carried his own name through two centuries. It is significant that nobody in Sahamadio could remember the name of Randriandamborodona's father. He was left behind to the east.

Some of the psychological and social factors involved in migration are highlighted by Wooley (1998) in his discussion of homesteading amongst the Sahafatra. As young men leave their natal villages in search of land that is still 'young', they are beset by mixed emotions. Leaving home to open up new land is a route to independence and glory. Carving out a place in the landscape is a way of making a name for oneself. But the potential of the new land is balanced by fear of the unknown. The promise of the future is in dynamic tension with a nostalgia for the past (Wooley 1998:34-5).

But if there was one thing more important than ancestral land, it was descendants. The strong desire to people the landscape with offspring was both the impetus and the justification for leaving the *tanindrazana*. Multiplication was a vital facet of ancestral success. The ancestor who settled on the hilltop of Vohitsoa was called Raimitombo ('the lord of multiplication'). Paradoxically, it was through the prosperity and fecundity of their living descendants that dead ancestors grew in stature. Ideally, these descendants would live near to the ancestor's tomb, conferring respect through ritual attention, and honour through their fertility and wealth (Graeber 1999:322). But in Sahamadio this simply was not possible with the limited land available. Multiplication necessarily entailed migration. Many villages in the highlands are called Ambohimombo ('town of multiplication') because they are offshoots of previous settlements. If the fecundity of the lineage could be grafted on to another land, then there was no fault in leaving (Raison 1984:447). In fact, if greater prosperity lay elsewhere, then migration to a new fertile land could only confer honour upon the ancestors. This point was brought home to me one morning as I stood with Radolphe, grazing his cattle in the valley of Sahamadio. I asked him to point out to me the ricefields belonging to

different named descent groups. He explained that in addition to their original fields in Sahamadio his own descent group, Andriamilanja, had opened up many new fields one day's walk to the west. But was it not preferable, I asked, to stay and farm the fields of one's ancestors, to be near them and their tombs? Yes, he said, this was important, but not everybody could stay. What mattered most to the ancestors was *fitomboana* - their increase and reproduction in future generations.

This was certainly true from Radolphe's perspective, standing in the ancestral land of the descent group looking outwards to the lands settled by the satellite offspring of Andriamilanja, who had opened up this valley himself two centuries ago. But just as increase necessitated dispersal, so did dispersal imply an eventual severance, both material and symbolic, with the *tanindrazana*. While Radolphe regarded those scattered descendants to the west as belonging to Andriamilanja's tomb group, the likelihood was that they would soon cease to bring home their dead to be buried in Sahamadio. Instead they would form a new descent group in their new land, just as Andriamilanja had done in his new land eight generations before. *Fitomboana*, then, whilst it implied an ancestor's fecundity, remembrance and renown, also entailed severance, forgetting and obscurity as the twin forces of time and dispersal took their toll on those ancestors long dead in the places of the past. There was danger in success. The further the migration, the greater the chance of permanent severance, as we shall see as we turn further to the west.

Migration to the mid west

This ambivalent relationship to displacement, coupled with the availability of land near to the *tanindrazana*, enabled slow short-haul migration to persist as a viable means of agricultural subsistence over many generations. This is what shaped the settlement of Fisakana. This is what founded Ambohipo. But in the twentieth century this pattern of migration was no longer viable because there simply was not enough land available in the vicinity of Sahamadio. The eastern highlands were severely over-populated, with Fisakana the most

crowded area, having 80 people per square kilometre (Deschamps 1959:113). Migration became more long-distance. Agricultural migration found its outlet in the wild uncultivated spaces of the mid west beyond the highlands, where the population density was under five people per square kilometre (1959:113). Removal to the mid west was a drastic, risky but potentially rewarding strategy. Yet for many families, particularly those of slave descent such as that of Rakotobe's eldest son Alexis (see Chapter One) it offered the only reasonable option.

There were several families in Ambohipo with kin who had been attracted by government initiatives to settle the vast grassy unpeopled plains of western Madagascar. The west provided an agricultural environment contrasting strongly with that of Sahamadio, which was consistently described by locals as cramped (*tery*) and infertile (*manta*). The west on the other hand was said, even by those villagers who had never been there - and most had not - to be wide open (*malalaka*) and fertile (*mahavokatra*).

This notion of a cultivator's paradise was overshadowed by rumours of the more dangerous aspects of life in the west. Malaria was endemic, but of graver concern in the popular imagination was the threat of cattle rustlers (*dahalo*). These lawless gangs were said to roam the open savannah sacking isolated settlements at gunpoint and disappearing again into the wilderness with the stolen livestock. When I crossed the west by lorry from Tsiroanomandidy to Maintirano I saw for myself the evidence: abandoned villages with their cattle pens broken open and houses marked by bullet holes; a young boy, perhaps twelve years old, minding his herd of cattle with a Kalashnikov over his shoulder; our lorryload of passengers even included a gendarme taking three young men arrested for cattle theft for trial at Maintirano. But however significant the risks were, they were not enough to prevent those short of land and opportunity in Ambohipo from taking their chances in the new world.

Landscape and people

For anyone raised among the ordered, sculpted rice fields of Sahamadio, the bare, wide plains of the west would be daunting. This landscape was, to the Betsileo mind, wilderness: limitless and open, with nothing growing but the tall, swaying savannah grass; miles of undulating hills dipping and rising to the horizon, the monotony broken only by the broad red scars of soil erosion so numerous that they became another monotony in themselves; no sign of life for miles, for days. But if the openness of this wilderness was threatening, the wealth of space was also intrinsic to its promise - here was land to cultivate, blessed with a rich volcanic soil. It seemed to be just waiting for the spade.

In the parts of the west that I travelled through, it was not only Betsileo who were putting down roots. Beyond Tsiroanomandidy the villages that straggled out along the westerly road were a mixture of migrant Malagasy from different corners of the island: pale, thin-faced Merina shopkeepers; young Bara men with luminescent combs in their Afro hair, gaudy undersize shirts and outlandish hats; gold-toothed Antandroy in broad-brimmed hats; southern Betsileo in tight shorts, lambas and spades over their shoulders, striding briskly over the tops to the fields. This was a mixed society. Deschamps, writing forty years before my visit (1959:28), mentions a lack of social structure and tradition amongst the populations of the far west. But more recent geographical and ethnographic research would seem to contradict this claim (Raison 1984; Evers 1999). However disparate this pioneer society, and whatever the range of ideas and practices they brought with them from their ancestral lands, they had much to unite them. Their commonality lay in their all having left the poverty of the old country for the modest prosperity of the new. More intent upon the future than the past, the settlers of the west were becoming both geographically and symbolically removed from their ancestral base. In one village I asked a sixteen year-old Merina girl where her *tanindrazana* was. Born in the west, she did not know and had to go and find her mother, who told me. The girl was a new generation - the

baby she rocked in her arms was a newer generation still; this was his home and it was becoming his ancestral land.

Settling in

Those who left for the west needed a way in - a friend or family, some connection who could take them in until they found their feet. There was one village of Ambohipo migrants in the west, which was where Rakotobe's son Alexis headed for with his family. Such settlements were, in effect, distant satellites of the ancestral villages back in the east. As a way in, family relations are crucial. The migrants are attracted by their relations vaunting the west's fertility (Raison 1984:447). The family connection tends to suit established migrants, as they often have more land than they can usefully work. The newly-arrived dependent relatives are a useful source of labour, and they hope to secure land through this service to their kin (Bloch 1971:81). This is the pattern by which settlements grow quickly (Deschamps 1959:101). A Betsileo settler in the village of Fitekoloaha near Ankaramena - an area traditionally home to the more pastoral Bara - told me how he had arrived as an outsider (*vahiny*) five years previously and had since been working for longer-established kin, saving money to build his own house. Only then would he be properly settled (*valofotaka*). The first settlers had arrived forty years ago, he said. They had gradually multiplied, adapting themselves slowly to the new landscape by growing manioc and grazing cattle, and adapting the landscape to themselves by carving narrow valleys of terraced paddy fields. Everyone in Fitekoloaha was Betsileo, including the teachers in the primary school, but they got on well with the more peripatetic, cattle-oriented Bara on whose land they had come to live. Those who had been there longest, he said, had adopted Bara ways (*fomba*). This could have meant anything from the crops they grew to the way they buried their dead. To those migrant Betsileo, it was an intrinsic part of the settlement process. They were becoming what was known as Barabory - a new ethnic mixture, neither Betsileo nor Bara.

Tombs and *tanindrazana*

In that migrant's accent I detected the heavy-tongued syllables of the east, the land he still regarded as the land of his ancestors. The original settlers of Fitekoloha, however, had moved on physically and emotionally, building tombs of black stone amongst the tall yellow grass of the savannah where they laid the bones of migrants who would never return east. Writing of a similar area of the west, Raison claims that it was a 'fait exceptionnel' for migrants to build tombs in the new land. Very few families in his study had 'severed the umbilical cord which linked them to the *tanindrazana*' (Raison 1984:21,451). Bloch describes a similar situation amongst Merina living far from their ancestral lands. Although they had left the past far behind them, they reconstituted it imaginatively through the prospect of burial in the *tanindrazana* (1971:76). But the new tombs I witnessed amongst the Barabory represented a definitive physical severance with the *tanindrazana* even if an imaginative connection lingered on. They were the first roots of a new ancestral tree planted in a new ancestral land. From here there was little looking back.

There was little going back, too. Despite their improved circumstances and any sentimental ties to the *tanindrazana*, the migrants often found that they could not afford to return - for visits, for *lanonana* (tomb ceremonies - see glossary), or even to take kin home for burial. This was purely a matter of finance. The taxi-brousse fare was expensive - and corpses paid double, even though they travelled on the roof rack. Unsurprisingly, people buried in the new country if they could. There were two obstacles to this. One was the cost of building a new tomb. The other was the restriction on doing so. The latter was mainly a problem for people of slave descent.

Descendants of slaves

Much of what has been said above about the relationship to the *tanindrazana* does not really apply to the descendants of slaves. As sharecroppers they did not own 'ancestral fields'. If their ancestors had contributed to the construction of the rice plain, it was within a

relationship of servility and coercion. They did not belong to named descent groups with written histories. Their tombs were secluded and humble, not prominent and celebrated like those of people of free descent. For these reasons, migration to the far west, usually with little prospect of return, was not overburdened with issues of inheritance and ancestry, as it was for the free. If anything, severance was made easier by the poor living conditions and negative connotations of the land they left.

But migrants of slave descent did not necessarily leave their problems of status and land behind. The predicament such people face on settling in the west is described by Evers (1999). When migrants arrive in the new area they are asked by the long-established settlers (*tompon-tany*) to identify their *tanindrazana*. If they cannot do this to the satisfaction of the *tompon-tany*, then their slave origins are instantly suspected. If they are permitted to settle at all, they are subjected to severe stigmatisation, perhaps more severe than they experienced in the land they abandoned. Marriage with 'clean people' is restricted. Residence is limited to the western periphery of the village. They are denied land, and their labour is exploited. Without land they are unable to build their own tomb. This forces them to bury their dead furtively at night in unmarked graves in the mountains (Evers 1999:266-73).

When Razorza of Amboasary, a man of slave descent, heard of his brother's death in a new settlement in the west, he set off to fetch the corpse. Due to the high price of wood in the treeless west, Razorza carried the timber for the coffin all the way from Ambohipo. Then he carried his brother home to be buried in the large tomb shared by all families of slave descent in Sahamadio. Were it not for this feat of fraternal dedication, Razorza's brother might never have returned from the west. It is probable that, like the settlers described by Evers, he had no land there on which to be buried. He could well have ended up interred by night on a distant mountainside.

In Chapter One we saw how Alexis left with his family to settle in Belobaka, where he already had relations from Ambohipo.

Given the lack of land in his home village, and the lack of a family tomb, it is highly improbable that he or his family will ever return to Ambohipo - dead or alive. For him this is perhaps not a great worry. The break with the *tanindrazana* is easier when it has never meant much in the first place.

Migration to the city

The main route to the city was by way of the classroom. As their schooling progressed, students became slowly more removed from the village. Primary schooling took place on the outskirts of the village. The secondary school stood on the hillside between Ambohipo and Milamaina. Those students who continued to lycée usually spent the week in lodgings in the market town of Fandriana. Finally, university education entailed a prolonged residence in Antananarivo or one of the island's other cities.

This was the culmination of a series of investments and sacrifices made by families with professional aspirations for their children. The investment and the estrangement would bear fruit only when educational qualifications were translated into professional employment. Just as family support was essential to educational advancement, so it could be instrumental in securing employment or support in the city.

Kin and compatriots

Making a good living in the city was not a foregone conclusion, even for the educated and qualified. There were several university graduates from Ambohipo who found it difficult to secure regular employment yet who remained in Antananarivo, unwilling to give up the higher standard of living to which they had become accustomed. Besides, they usually had family in Antananarivo with whom they could live while waiting for a lucky break. Thus family ties within the city could be just as important as those between city and village. At his house in the southern outskirts of Antananarivo, Léonard had living with him his two youngest brothers (both university students), another

unemployed graduate brother, a cousin, his wife's sister with her husband and daughter, as well as his wife's other sister and her small boy. Such networks of dependence and support enabled people to stay on in the city when otherwise they would have been obliged to return to the village and make the best of things there.

The village-in-the-city network also operated on a professional level. One son of Ambohipo, who was a senior manager at the military hospital, was able to use his influence when members of his extended family required medical treatment. Most of the Ambohipo expatriates in Antananarivo used the same dentist, himself a son of the village; those who could afford it brought their village relatives to this man for their dentistry, so that in fact about one third of his patients were originally or actually from Ambohipo. In terms of urban employment, Ambohipo expatriates were similarly cohesive. The office run by Léonard was at one time entirely staffed by young people from the village. When he left the post, the staff he had installed were slowly replaced by the compatriots of the new director.

Organisations of *ampielezana*

One means by which educated city-dwelling expatriates maintained their connection with the *tanindrazana* and with each other was through associations of *ampielezana* in the big cities. Such was the scale of education-inspired emigration that there existed associations of expatriates from the Fandriana area throughout Madagascar. These ranged from informal groups of people native to one village, to organised associations encompassing emigrants from the whole Fisakana region. Some of these groups operated on a purely social basis, others raised money for development projects in the villages. On one occasion I joined a group of young people whose common origin was the valley of Sahamadio on a picnic to the outskirts of Antananarivo where we sat on a hillside eating cold red rice brought in from the *tanindrazana*, played volleyball and held an auction of crisps and snacks to raise money for further outings. Some of these people had not been back to Sahamadio for several years and saw little of

each other outside these special events. Others, however, moved frequently between the different worlds and codes of urban Antananarivo and rural Sahamadio. This depended on their financial situation, personal inclination and how many close kin they still had living in the valley.

I went to one party in Antananarivo held for people whose *tanindrazana* was Ambohipo. They turned up in motor cars dressed in fashionable clothes, drank beer and danced, acting in every way like the young urbanites they were. Some had not even been born in the village, others had spent most of their lives away from it, many went there infrequently, if at all. In a way, meeting with other Ambohipo *ampielezana* in Antananarivo was the strongest affirmation they had of their ancestral homeland. The evening opened with a traditional Betsileo dance in the slow, mannered, back-and-forth style of rural Fisakana before giving way to more vigorous disco dancing. In his opening speech the host's elder brother reminded the guests of their love for the ancestral land, the importance of remembering it, and please would they not smoke inside the house for the sake of the new parquet floor. Drinkers communing over bottles of Three Horses Beer longed instead for the fiery taste of the local rum, Ambodivoara, and envied my living in the village although, they said, they could no longer live there themselves.

When I asked why this was the case I was given a stock answer: that they could not re-adapt to the physical strain of agricultural work, to the hardness of the life, to the poverty of the diet. But I suspect there were other factors at play, and that in their city lives these young migrants had grown used not just to different work, food and clothes but to different ways, freedoms and codes. A gathering of *ampielezana* was a perfect setting to conjure up the ideal of the village without suffering its reality: thus in evoking the *tanindrazana* they kept it conveniently at arms' length. So this new urban commonality operated largely free from the codes and customs of village society and politics. For example, whilst there were no inter-denominational Catholic-Lutheran marriages between young people

resident in Ambohipo, there had recently been three between *ampielezana* who had become engaged while living in Antananarivo. It was almost as if a village existed outside the village.

Working for the *tanindrazana*

The *ampielezana* did not just meet socially. There was also a group called the Association of People Born in the Parish of Milamaina (*Fikambanana Teraka Fivondronom-pokontany Milamaina*). Known for short as FITEFIMI, the association's purpose was to raise money and oversee projects of rural improvement in the parish which included Ambohipo. It was run by a trainee doctor living in Antananarivo, an earnest and bespectacled young man called Radonné who had been liaising with a German NGO to fund small-scale rural development projects. One day he took his team to Ambohipo to discuss strategies for action with the people of his home parish.

To this end, one day at noon a meeting was held in the narrow band of shade to the west of the hospital. FITEFIMI was represented by Radonné, four young people in jeans and sunglasses, and a girl with a clipboard. The Ambohipo contingent consisted of the mayor, the president of the *fokontany*, some teachers, a few curious boys minding cattle nearby, and a curious anthropologist. Despite the fact that the issues to be discussed originally concerned agricultural improvement, there were no cultivators (apart from the elderly Radaniel) present; they were all away in the fields cultivating.

The proceedings opened with a short and typically low-key speech from the unassuming President of the Fokontany, Rasamson. Then the mayor, waiting impatiently in the wings, took over. He delivered a rather redundant introductory talk on Ambohipo, which stressed the agricultural basis of subsistence ('there are no factories here'), the poor quality of the soil ('what the people need is fertiliser'), and the intellectual profile of the valley ('there is one professor at the Sorbonne who is from Milamaina and all his students are *vazaha*'). Radonné replied, underlining FITEFIMI's desire to assist: 'We remember our ancestral land and wish to help', he declared. In order to

obtain the foreign money, he explained, it would be necessary to form a local organisation with structure, leadership and regular meetings. As soon as he got a chance to speak again, the mayor proposed himself as leader of the group since he was the local representative of central government - this despite the specifically non-governmental nature of the project. Various possible projects were discussed, including a library to be run from the mayor's office at Milamaina, to which members would make a contribution of 100 *ariary* or the equivalent amount of rice if they preferred.

Over the next few weeks FITEFIMI and the villagers of Ambohipo and Milamaina settled on a project which would respond to the needs and aspirations of the local community: the refurbishment of the secondary school. This solved the problem of forming a new organisation to co-ordinate the project since there already existed a Parent-Teacher Association; it also scuppered the mayor's leadership ambitions as he had no existing role in the running of the school. The choice of the school as the recipient of FITEFIMI's aid was revealing in that it demonstrated the prevailing - though not unanimous - belief in the importance of the school as integral to future local prosperity. As far as the *ampielezana* of FITEFIMI were concerned, they had the school to thank for their present position in life, indeed for their ability to help the *tanindrazana*. There could be few better ways of 'remembering the ancestral land' than by renovating the school.

Tombs and *tanindrazana*

If there did exist a better way of remembering the ancestral land it was through the tomb. This will be discussed at length in Chapter Five. At this point it is necessary to point out simply how the urban nature of educated migrants' dispersal articulated with their relation to their tomb and *tanindrazana*. Firstly, unlike agricultural migrants, they would not build tombs in the land of residence. Many did not own enough - if any - land where they lived in the city on which to build tombs. Even if they did it would not be considered an appropriate site for a Betsileo tomb. Secondly, their patterns of income enabled visits

to the ancestral land and to the tomb. Thirdly, some of this income was spent on tombs and tomb ceremonies (*lanonana*) in the *tanindrazana*. For these reasons, unlike agricultural migrants, the tombs of educated migrants did not 'follow' them to their new place of residence.

On the contrary, they stayed put. And filled up with the corpses of villagers and their urban kin, some of whom returned only to be buried. The main tomb in Ambohipo - the one founded by the Twelve Men when they brought the body of Ralaizafy across the valley - had been in constant use for well over a century. It now served such a wide and dispersed descent group that the organisational structure for its maintenance had disintegrated. The one time I went inside I saw how crowded and in need of repair it was. Some of the ancestors had spent that afternoon outside in the fresh air being wrapped in new shrouds. As night fell they were being stacked back on their slabs by a group of young men made clumsy by an afternoon of drinking Ambodivoara. The tomb was completely full, the shelves crammed stiff with ancestors. What space was left was taken up by the candlelit bumbings of the drunken living. Batota tried to show me round. 'These ones here,' he said, pointing to a rigid row of packages protected from the dripping roof by a plastic sheet. 'These ones here. I forget who they are. Does anyone know who they are?' No one heard him above the singing. Somebody was shouting for the light, someone else for the ladder. We left the tomb singing and clapping, arms round shoulders, loosely tripping over each other's feet, and leaving the dead wedged firmly in their small dank space.

It is not surprising that Batota could not remember the names of the ancestors under the sheet. Apart from Batota's being drunk and not yet of an age to be entrusted with such information, it was clear that there were simply too many ancestors packed up into anonymous bundles for everybody to be able to remember them. Many of these bundles contained several ancestors, combinations of spouses and parents and children. Perhaps they were meant to be forgotten and neglected. This rough bundling and careless stacking has been interpreted variously as 'ritual sacrilege' (Bloch 1971:159) and

‘genealogical amnesia’ (Graeber 1996:207). I think the important factor here was actually the nature of urban migration so prevalent in Ambohipo. While an educated child might eventually bring in a good salary, which would reflect well upon parents and ancestors, and be used in their care, there was inherent in that success the danger that the child might sever the connections with the *tanindrazana*. Living in the city might lead to forgetting or abandoning the customs of the ancestors, one of which was their care in the afterlife. In this way, the very prosperity of the descendants could in fact work against the interests of the forbears. The Ambohipo tomb and its ancestors were neglected in part because so many of the descendants had moved so far away and were leading such different lives. This is an important aspect of the discussion on knowledge featured in Chapters Six and Seven.

However, some wealthy *ampielezana* families managed to live prosperous lives away from the *tanindrazana* while still honouring and remembering their ancestors buried there. With this in mind the Ravalitera family broke away from the old leaky overcrowded main tomb and built a new one for themselves a few hundred yards to the west. This is discussed further in Chapter Four.

Some wealthy *ampielezana* families had sought a way out of this problem by building tombs of their own. For the moment I only note that the self-conscious remembering involved in the building of a new tomb does not fit well with the idea of ‘genealogical amnesia’. Nor does the conscientious way in which Ralex taught his sister the names of the female ancestors in their family’s new tomb. The tension between remembering and forgetting ancestors is a leitmotif of Malagasy ethnography. It applies to the way individuals relate to the ancestors, their tombs, their customs and their land.

Ampielezana and ancestral fields

The nature of rural-urban migration entailed a particular configuration of relationships between migrants and their agricultural land in the *tanindrazana*. Long-term separation from the fields and lack of

practical engagement with them had implications for their relationships with non-migrant kin and other villagers.

Firstly, there was the question of labour. *Ampielezana* who owned fields in Ambohipo did not leave them fallow. Those educated families who had been away from the village over several generations used sharecroppers, who paid one third of the harvest in rent. The owners' role was one of overseeing, especially at harvest time. Other absentees used wage labour, which was often organised and mediated through a resident family member. The ability to employ other villagers, some of them kin, was a reflection of the subtle graduations of status and influence which urban migration created. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Four.

Secondly, living in the city removed migrants from the physical interaction with the ancestral land discussed earlier in this chapter. Some educated migrants confessed (or boasted, depending on the degree of sophistication they wished to portray) that they were no longer tough enough to perform agricultural work. This was usually expressed through the idiom of 'soft hands'. Whereas agricultural workers had hard callused hands, those of *ampielezana* blistered easily if they were to spend a day with a spade. As with wage labour, the difference between soft and hard hands was a marker of social difference. It reflected a division in village society between town and country, rich and poor, modern and traditional, sophisticate and peasant, the pen and the spade. The relationship of *ampielezana* to their fields was pregnant with ideas about status, differentiation and identity.

Ancestral fields were important in this respect because they combined both economic and symbolic value. As the price of rice rose steadily in the town, so the economic value of rice fields in the country went up too. All available land was exploited to its full potential. The portion of the rice crop which Raharisoa took as rent from her sharecroppers accounted for a considerable part of her yearly consumption. When it had been dried and husked, she took it back with her to Antananarivo.

Rice from Sahamadio also had sentimental and symbolic value for urban migrants. Whenever I went to Antananarivo, I was given rice to take to the family there. They would be delighted, not just because it provided a change from the usual Chinese or Pakistani rice they ate in town, but because of the specific connotations of this rice with the *tanindrazana*. This rice was red in colour, of heavy consistency, and of a slightly nutty flavour. But it was of more than gastronomic relevance. As Carsten has shown for Malay fishing people, to share rice is to share substance. As such it connotes relatedness (1997:111). Eating rice from Sahamadio in the city could be described as long distance commensality. It maintained a bond with the village, the family and the very fields in which the rice was grown. It was a link to the ancestors. I met many successful and educated urban dwellers who had adopted European mannerisms, clothes and affectations. But however urbane and sophisticated their tastes grew, however soft their hands, they nevertheless retained a passionate appetite for the red rice of home.

Conclusion

Given the shortage and poor quality of the land in Sahamadio, the everyday business of making a living was never straightforward. It involved choices, compromises, sacrifices. It meant looking in two directions at once: to the traditions of the ancestors on one hand and to the needs of their descendants on the other; to the legacy of the past and also to the exigencies of the future. It involved a balancing of individual aspiration with familial responsibility. In short, it meant knowing whether to stay or go.

But people in Ambohipo were pragmatic. Although they had a strong sentimental attachment to their ancestral lands, they did not necessarily retain a practical one - that is to say, if the search for livelihood or the dream of prosperity lay elsewhere, those who could do so would go looking for it. And once departed, they retained or severed their ties to the homeland according to their ability and inclination.

Some stayed, others left; some prospered, others barely survived; some returned, others were never seen again. People strategised their lives according to means, opportunity and desire, which each person held in differing quantities. Consequently, they achieved different levels of prosperity, became more or less attached to their land, their past, their kin. In this strategising they exercised free will, they took risks and made compromises, adopting or rejecting new means of livelihood, moving to new places or staying in old ones, setting off into the future while casting a backward glance at the past.

This chapter has shown how various styles of northern Betsileo migration were mediated through differing relationships to the *tanindrazana*. Migration arose from both necessity and desire. It brought opportunity and autonomy, yet entailed danger and regret. The blessing conferred by living in the ancestral land could not offset the need for subsistence and the wish for prosperity. Blessing was vital. When people left to go on a journey, they went to the tomb or their parents to ask blessing. This blessing was ambiguous: it both granted permission and conferred protection. The desire that ancestors and elders felt to have their offspring near to them was mitigated by the realisation that without prosperous descendants their own position as fecund ancestors was threatened. That is why education was so important in the crowded and infertile valley of Sahamadio: it offered prosperity, without which fertility was useless. Yet at the same time, like all forms of migration, it threatened the ancestors' status because it entailed the probability of severance and the possibility of neglect. Again, there was danger in success.

Education and urban migration have created novel ways of relating to the *tanindrazana*. In the case of rural migration, the problem of the growing distance between the migrant and the tomb could be resolved by building a new tomb in the new land. Whilst bringing an old ancestor to inaugurate a new tomb initially maintained the link with the *tanindrazana*, the result was an eventual severance - symbolic and actual. I have described this process in order to make a contrast with recent patterns of urban migration. In these cases the

tombs did not follow the migrant. Instead they got full of ancestors until someone with disposable income relieved the pressure by building a new one nearby. This pattern of migration, and this kind of moneyed ritual relationship with the *tanindrazana*, have not been adequately treated in the ethnography of Madagascar. The next two chapters attempt to redress that imbalance through a discussion of the role of education in widening social and ritual differentiation.

Chapter Four

Socio-economic differentiation

Agriculturally, Sahamadio is a typical highland rice valley. It has carefully made terraces, upland pasture, paddy fields in the valley bottom. Architecturally, it is idiosyncratic. If you were to walk through Ambohipo, you would be aware that this was no ordinary Malagasy village, for you would be struck by the variety of the houses. Many are huge and domineering, square brick edifices with iron rooves: town houses transplanted to the countryside. These are the houses of the educated people, and for the most part they stand shuttered, empty and silent, awaiting their owner's next visit. There are also some less prepossessing dwellings: rickety old country houses with living quarters upstairs and granaries, tool-stores and chicken-runs beneath; if there is nobody in as you pass, it is because they are out in the fields. You will also see, tucked away to the west of the village, a small cluster of mud and thatch tumbledown cottages that at first glance seem quaintly rustic, but which in reality are home to severe and debilitating rural poverty. In these houses live the descendants of slaves: they have little land of their own to farm and you will find them sharecropping the fields of the educated absentees.

It was Ambohipo's houses that attracted me to the village as a field site. The big, grand empty ones were particularly intriguing. I experienced a perverse fascination in the gross concrete shell of Rafelix's house. Started in the 1960s it had never been completed. Now trees grew up inside it, competing for the sky with the rusting reinforcement rods. The roof, like Rafelix, was long departed. But the breeze blocks stood firm, and unshuttered windows stared blackly across the valley. While I was amazed at this monster, the people of Ambohipo seemed to take it for granted. A big empty un-lived-in house was nothing unusual. There were several others.

The interesting thing from the point of view of the ethnography of Madagascar is the juxtaposition of these empty mansions with the

shabby overcrowded dwellings of Ambohipo's resident population. The homes of the urban rich and the rural poor stood side by side. This chapter explores the background to this socio-economic differentiation, with particular reference to the role of formal education in its creation. Then Chapter Five discusses its ritual elaboration. The subject of socio-economic differentiation within Malagasy communities has received little anthropological attention. This is not a criticism of previous work. Rather, it is a testament to the unique character of Sahamadio. This chapter identifies several significant factors responsible for socio-economic differentiation in Ambohipo, of which the most recent and most potent is formal education. But other factors, which I discuss below, were also at play before schooling arrived in the valley. In this chapter I show that rather than democratising socio-economic opportunity, education channelled it towards those people who were already socially and economically advantaged.

Land

Highland Madagascar is notoriously short of good agricultural land (Raison 1984, 1994), and its uneven distribution is both a cause and an index of social differentiation. Pavageau's engaging study of a rural village in Imerina in the 1970s describes a society where - as in Fisakana - the issue of land is of paramount importance (Pavageau 1981). He describes the frustrations of the younger generation as they wait to inherit the land owned by village elders. Unlike the northern Betsileo, however, there is no tradition of success in formal education, and so the youth vacillate between scratching a living as day labourers in the *tanindrazana* or migrating to Antananarivo in search of unskilled work. The young are, for Pavageau, victims of their position in the age hierarchy, against which they posit their own hierarchy of prestige based on technical competence, initiative and wealth. But the hierarchy of age continues to dominate and forms the ideological basis for the elders' capturing of the village's surplus labour. The kinship relations which are played out through submission to parental

authority and through supporting elderly parents (*valim babena* - 'returning the carrying') have been transformed under the colonial capitalist monetary economy into relations of exploitation (Pavageau 1981:103). While the junior people in the village (young men, people of slave descent, women) form a rural proletariat, the seniors (male elders) form a landholding class able to convert their wealth into cattle. This represents both a sound material investment - as cattle are a valuable means of production - and a symbolic statement, since they confer prestige upon the owner.

Pavageau's study is valuable in that it highlights the importance of land in economic differentiation. But he oversimplifies the issue by stressing the role of the age hierarchy too strongly. Unlike the societies in Africa, from the studies of which he imports his Marxist model (e.g. Meillassoux 1975), the link between access to land and seniority is not so clear-cut. In highland Madagascar land is generally passed on to heirs while the parents are alive, and the profits are shared. In Sahamadio, problems tended to arise after the parents' death, when there was not enough land to be shared amongst all the siblings.

Land in Sahamadio

Land was crucial to rural subsistence in Sahamadio. Very few people had enough of it to provide fully for their family's needs. This was partly because the valley was so populated that there was little land left to cultivate; but it was also due to the exceedingly poor quality of the soil and correspondingly low crop yields. Consequently land was considered the most important form of wealth. Unsurprisingly it was often the cause of bitter legal wranglings, usually as a result of disputed inheritance. Land was also a determining factor in migration: lack of land in the *tanindrazana* frequently necessitated displacement to less crowded areas, but surplus of land could also enable migration by providing the economic stability to invest in alternative projects such as schooling.

One proverb which I sometimes heard used in Sahamadio was: 'It is better to lose the support of wealth than the support of kin' (*aleo very ny tsikalakalan-karena toy izay very tsikalakalam-pihavanana*). But unfortunately where land was concerned this sentiment was frequently disregarded, and families were often torn apart over land disputes. One case involved three brothers: On the death of their father, the eldest son inherited his extensive ricefields because only he had been named in the will as the other two younger brothers were still minors. The older brother went off to Antananarivo to work, whereupon the middle brother took over the inheritance and cultivated it all himself, leaving nothing for the youngest brother, Radolphe, except for a small patch of undeveloped hillside pasture. Radolphe, however, was a skilled cultivator, and put his meagre inheritance to the spade to great success. But he never forgave his brother, and relations between their respective families were almost totally severed except for formal public platitudes. Radolphe refused to eat at his brother's house, saying that he feared poisoning. This was an attitude of great significance, for just as commensality symbolises kinship in Malagasy society, so refusal to eat together repudiates that bond.

Radolphe's inheritance may have been meagre, but he married an only child. This was something of a rarity in Ambohipo, where it was not uncommon for families to have as many as ten children. Living comfortably off their combined land, Radolphe and his wife raised ten children of their own. They invested their surplus income in educating their children, eight of whom achieved their baccalauréat. The eldest son was Léonard, who became director of the country's largest development NGO, brought piped water to Ambohipo, and for many years was the richest and most influential of the village's sons. At one point 41 people originating from Ambohipo worked in Léonard's nationwide operation as drivers, technical advisers, secretaries and manual labourers. He was the first member of his family to enter higher education, and although his success owed a much to his intellectual brilliance, it was the moderate agricultural

prosperity which his mother's inheritance enabled that paid the school fees and the boarding costs at the lycée in Fandriana.

Léonard's story shows how schooling could alter a family's economic base from subsistence to surplus in the space of one generation. Many Ambohipo families, however, had a history of educational success over two or three generations. These wealthy families, usually absent from the village, were descended from ancestors who had large landholdings. This land had been kept in the family through strategic endogamy. Even though they often lived away from Ambohipo, they still tended to marry people originating from the village. Indeed in-marriage had become a defining characteristic of the descendants of the Twelve Men, and tactical alliance to conserve landholdings features strongly in their descent group history. Whereas other local descent groups were characterised as expert sorcerers, good farmers, or noisy partygoers, the descendants of the Twelve Men were known the length of the valley for marrying their kin (*manambady havana*). They also observed rigid ancestral taboos outlawing marriage to a number of other local descent groups.

Even though some landowning families succeeded at school and left the village to work in Antananarivo, they did not give up their rights to their fields in the village. As in Imerina (Bloch 1986:36; Raison-Jourde 1991:364) wealthier families used people of slave descent to sharecrop their fields in their absence. Thus the Lutheran Ravalitera family had not farmed their own fields for four generations, but had an arrangement with the descendants of their ancestor's slaves concerning their cultivation. It was the practice of Raharisoa to return to Ambohipo chauffeured by her son at harvest time to oversee the distribution of rice amongst her sharecroppers (see Chapter One). The scene was remarkably similar to this LMS missionary account from nineteenth-century Imerina, quoted by Raison-Jourde (1991:364): 'The landed gentry have their houses in town, attend our urban parishes and send their children to school in town, and they also have their country homes where they settle for the dry season and are surrounded by their dependants and slaves.'

So land was an important factor in social and economic differentiation in that it allowed some people to live away from Ambohipo and to pursue lucrative professional training and employment without abandoning their economic and social stake in the village. *Ampielezana* also used land in Ambohipo as a means of supplementing their salaries and providing a back-up means of subsistence in case of unemployment or upon retirement. Moreover, the income and expertise these people gained from their lives away were often used as means of increasing the productivity of those fields or even of acquiring new ones. So Léonard, who had studied agricultural science at university, was confident in trying out various foreign modern techniques on his fields while at the same time continuing with some traditional methods. For example he still used cattle to trample the rice fields, not for the sake of tradition but because his scientific education had taught him the importance of oxygenating the soil. He had not yet inherited any land in the village, but had bought some fields of his own from a man who had moved west and needed money to build a tomb in his new land. He also owned four cattle which his sister looked after; these represented both a sound agricultural investment for the fertiliser they produced, and also reflected his status as a man of means.

Just as money earned as a result of schooling could be used to acquire land, so could the knowledge learned through study. The mayor, Rapaoly, who had studied law, ran an informal legal practice in Ambohipo whereby he represented villagers involved in land disputes at the tribunal in Fandriana. If his suit succeeded then he would refuse a cash payment, preferring to be paid in land instead. In this fashion he collected a number of small plots around the village.

Buying land in the village should not only be viewed as an economic investment. *Ampielezana* who used their town-earned cash to buy land in the *tanindrazana* were not simply supplementing their salaries or buying into rural pension plans, they were also demonstrating a social and personal connection to the valley. One such was Rasamoela, who was a successful civil servant in the colonial era.

On one famous occasion in the 1940s he came home with a pair of binoculars and took up a position on the eastern bank of the valley, surveying the land around Ambohipo. He then selected a prominent tract, made an offer to its owner, and built a smart new tomb upon it. The social and ritual dimensions of such investments are discussed in Chapter Five.

Senior status and connections with government

Another determinant of socio-economic differentiation in highland Madagascar is seniority. I do not intend this in Pavageau's misguided sense of elders hanging on to their land leaving their young dispossessed. Rather, seniority has been shown to create socio-economic inequalities when it forms the basis of distinction between groups of individuals, particularly descent groups or branches of the same descent group. This is a factor of great importance in Kottak's (1980) analysis of the history of socio-economic differentiation amongst the southern Betsileo. Kottak describes how branches of descent groups are ranked according to their descent from the oldest, older, or younger brothers of the sibling group that first settled the area (Kottak 1980:94). Relations of seniority amongst siblings, then, have transmuted over time into relations of hierarchy amongst their respective descendants as they form descent groups, leading to the distinction Kottak makes between senior and junior commoners.

Seniority in descent ranking is shown to be an advantage to the senior commoners in helping them gain access to status, wealth and power. Senior commoners represent themselves as guardians of the ancestral land and customs, and stress lineal over cognatic descent since this justifies their superior social status, a strategy noted by Bloch amongst Merina of similar rank (Bloch 1981:12).

Kottak argues that this differential in rank amongst the southern Betsileo had significant ramifications at the time of the Merina conquest. The high rank which senior commoners had enjoyed before the conquest and which they had maintained by means of ritual prestations was converted into political authority as they took up

positions as local representatives of the Merina. Collaboration was the route to power and wealth, whereas resistance led to poverty and ignominy, as those nobles who challenged Merina hegemony discovered to their cost: they were demoted to commoner status (Kottak 1980:73,88). Senior commoners who co-operated with the Merina were rewarded with governorships, giving them power over villages or groups of villages. The governor was usually the senior male of the senior local descent group, and his role involved tax collection, labour mobilisation, and military conscription. Governors also received gifts from the populace in the form of the first fruits of the rice harvest. To receive gifts in this manner was a mark of their superior status. This feature of Malagasy prestation is related to the giving of the *vody akoho* to the father of the family, or the rump of any slaughtered cattle to the feudal overlord in pre-Merina days (see Chapter Two). However, of greater material benefit than any gifts received was the profit the governors could derive from their access to the expanding imperial administration and economy. At an administrative level, governors gained influence through their contact with the ultimate source of power at the time, Antananarivo. Admittedly this was a rather tenuous link, but it was significant in local terms. Economically, they were able to make advantageous purchases of cattle, and particularly of slaves. Under Merina rule slaves were no longer acquired through local raiding, but by means of a national slave market fuelled by the expanding empire's conquests beyond the highlands. Kottak cites the example of one senior commoner who used his cut of local taxation to buy cattle and slaves. He put the slaves to work creating new rice fields; these fields then produced a surplus of rice which he traded for even more cattle and slaves (Kottak 1980:99).

In terms of the Merina empire such men were small cogs in a large imperial machine, whatever their local power and influence. But it was their relationship to central government that was crucial in widening the social and economic gap between themselves and their kin groups on one hand, and the junior commoners and slaves on the

other. Small farmers who had not allied themselves with the administration were particularly vulnerable to the demands of forced labour and taxation, the burden of which grew as the imperial economy declined (Kottak 1980:107; Ellis 1985:25). Slaves, however, were exempt from *fanompoana* and their situation depended largely on the fortunes of their master. They had no role in the operations of state (Bloch 1971:71), and having become lost to their homelands through war, capture and trading, their place was largely outside society (Raison-Jourde 1991:72). On liberation, many went in search of new lands to the west, but many also stayed behind to sharecrop the fields of their former masters (Kottak 1980:104).

So in Kottak's formulation differentiation is related in the first instance to senior status, and secondly to access to outside networks. Thus the slaves, who live outside society, remain impoverished and powerless; junior commoners grow poor as their lack of influence in affairs of state leads to manipulation and exploitation by the government; and the senior commoners grow wealthy and powerful through judicious manipulation of political status and authority. Kottak notes that it was largely members of this last group who benefitted from the institution of formal education. Their wealth enabled them to finance the studies of their kin, while their familiarity with the workings of the state helped them to handle with assurance the challenges and opportunities they faced in the world beyond the village (Kottak 1980:280-1). Even generations after the abolition of slavery, former slaves in the highlands were hampered by their inability to access the networks of influence in government and administration (Bloch 1980).

Status and government in Sahamadio

Ambohipo's importance as a centre of government probably dates from the early days of Merina occupation, soon after the village was founded. At that time, northern Betsileo society was - like Merina society - divided into three castes: slaves (*andevo*), commoners (*hova*), and nobles (*andriana*). However, the noble caste, perhaps due to its

resistance to Merina rule (see Chapter Two, and Kottak 1980:88), dwindled in numbers and their wealth and influence diminished (Varaine 1949:31). By the end of the twentieth century there was no trace of *andriana* living in Sahamadio, but their former presence was remembered in standing stones on hilltops such as Vahoadahy and Tsiankarandambo. These were sacred sites where people still made offerings, and they were protected by ancestral prohibitions. One of these was a taboo on pigs being taken to the top, and this is the literal meaning of Tsiankarandambo. This taboo is related to the fact that the *andriana* did not eat pork, a prohibition which would have distinguished them from commoners, and which was perhaps a way of demonstrating descent from east coast settlers of Arab origin. When I climbed Vahoadahy, my companion checked first that I had not eaten pork that day.

As we saw in Chapter Two, the local chief Rarivoekembahoaka put up significant resistance to the rule of Radama and was eventually defeated. Kottak (1980:92) notes that the southern Betsileo *andriana* who resisted Merina occupation were demoted to the rank of *hova* by their new rulers. This would account for the disappearance of *andriana* in Fisakana, leaving a two-tier society divided simply into slaves and free people. The former caste were socially and economically disadvantaged in relation to the latter, but there were distinctions too within the free caste. As Kottak notes for the southern Betsileo, these distinctions were made on the basis of the relative seniority of the founders of the local descent branches, creating a difference in status - and consequently wealth, power and economic opportunity - between what he calls senior and junior commoners (Kottak 1980:94). Although when I lived in Sahamadio nobody drew attention to this distinction, I think it was salient nonetheless. According to the local histories presented in Chapter One, the Twelve Men - the descent group that came to dominate in Ambohipo - were descended from Randriamahalefitra, the chubby baby born on an inauspicious day on the windy hilltop, who was exiled to save the life of his parents. He made a settlement on the

eastern bank of the valley of Sahamadio where his agriculture proved so prosperous that his younger brother followed him to the valley to found the nearby village of Ambalamanga. The two brothers became the founding ancestors of two named descent groups, but it was the descendants of the elder brother, Randriamahalefitra, who gained the greater renown, wealth and power in the valley. Randriamahalefitra's great grandson, Ravelona, was an influential 'chief of 100' under Merina rule. Based in Ambohipo, he was responsible for collecting taxes and organising conscription from lesser villages in the valley such as Ambalamanga, home of the junior brother's descent group. In one well-known story, an official from Ambohipo on a tax-collecting errand to Ambalamanga was clubbed, stoned and left for dead by the people of the village. This story was told me as the justification for an ancestral taboo on marriage between the two descent groups. I use it here, however, as a neat illustration of the tensions caused when the relationship of authority between the senior and junior branch became manifest in their respective political roles of tax collectors and tax payers. The political context of this event is related to the ritual process of prestation. The monarchs of Imerina referred to the taxes they received from their subjects as *hasina* (honour). Prestation in Madagascar always implies the seniority of the receiver over the giver. Ambalamanga's violent treatment of the Ambohipo tax collector was an act of both political and ritual significance.

Ambohipo remained the centre of political authority in the valley well into the early years of missionary activity. The Lutheran mission which had arrived in Fandriana in 1872 chose Ambohipo as the site of its first mission station in Sahamadio. This was partly due to the village's central location in the valley, but it was also a result of its status. Lutheran missionary activity in Vakinankaratra and Fisakana relied on good relations with the local elites. It was as a guest of the *tomponmenakely* of Fandriana that Stueland had established the first Norwegian mission in Fisakana, and so the Twelve Men of Ambohipo - the highest status descent group in the valley - made natural allies for the missionaries. In terms of contact with the exterior, the siting of the

church in Ambohipo gave the village an advantage over its neighbours. As the Church became more allied to central government, and acted increasingly as an organ of the state, those who had identified themselves with the Lutheran mission monopolised the positions of local influence. It was not until 1886 that a church was built in Milamaina. This was a Catholic church, and as such it provided local malcontents with a means of escaping Lutheran hegemony (Ellis 1985:53). As we saw in Chapter Two, this kind of denominational rivalry was later to escalate into outbreaks of sectarian violence. This violence was not based on theological differences but on a realisation of the social and economic benefits to be gained from adhesion to a particular church through that church's access (perceived or actual) to wealth and advantage from abroad.

Significantly, it was during this turbulent period that Milamaina replaced Ambohipo as the centre of political power in the valley, as it was made seat of the mayoral office by the French. Nevertheless, Ambohipo continued to be represented in government by such figures as the local administrator Rajohanesa (who vetoed the hospital in Chapter Two). In the latter years of the colonial era, one particularly influential civil servant was Ravalitera Samoela, son of Rasamoela owner of the celebrated binoculars. His position as Deputy Director of the Ministry of Education had for many years ensured that the schoolteachers of Ambohipo were found jobs locally rather than being posted off to work in undesirable distant corners of the island. When I lived in Ambohipo, the village's interests were represented at the level of valley politics by the mayor, Rapaoly.

The mayor was a good example of what we might call - with justified oxymoron - the rural bourgeoisie. An elected official, Rapaoly received a government salary, and provided a channel through which his peasant constituents could conduct their occasional business with the state. When he failed to win re-election to the mayoralty of Milamaina region, the people of Ambohipo were downcast that their man had been ousted - this despite the fact that they spent most of the time grumbling about his craftiness and

duplicity. The feeling was that anybody who understood the workings of the state could never be fully trusted, for their knowledge was of the esoteric and inaccessible kind. I discuss this further in Chapter Seven.

The connection between government, status, wealth and influence featured strongly in the political campaigning that preceded the 1998 national elections to the chamber of deputies. One local candidate, representing the President's AREMA party, held the post of director of the Fisakana Education Authority. He gave an electioneering speech in Milamaina attended by the village elders, the schoolteachers (who had cancelled school because they felt they ought to show allegiance to their boss's cause), and a few curious schoolchildren who gathered under the candidate's nose to marvel at his megaphone. His appeal for votes was based on the fact that his current position of influence in the government (as head of the Education Authority and a member of the President's party) made him the candidate most able to benefit the people of Fisakana. As he phrased it: 'Those who are near the rice server get given the rice.' To illustrate this point one of his aides held aloft a ten-litre can of paint as a gift to the secondary school; there was also a promise of footballs to come. Then the candidate's cortège of three Toyota saloons moved off down the valley. Ten minutes later another candidate arrived on a moped, followed by his assistant on a bicycle. In his speech he promised to fight corruption in the government, but offered neither paint nor footballs. The election was won by the AREMA candidate.

The social - and particularly the economic - advantages of proximity to government were not only apparent at election time - they were visible everywhere in Sahamadio. The huge hillside home of the former ambassador and local deputy, Pierre Vazaha (he adopted the name as a political pseudonym because he fancied it made him seem rich and worldly) was dubbed the 'white palace' by locals. The vast concrete shell of Ravelo Felix's house was said to have been built by government soldiers at the time when he commanded President Tsiranana's bodyguard. Even the sight of the *sous-préfet* of Fandriana being chauffeured along the bumpy valley road to Miadanimerina in a

battered Lada, his faded peaked cap trimmed with gold braid, spoke of a status and lifestyle far beyond the means of most local peasants.

Slaves

Having considered the importance of descent group seniority in creating social and economic advantage in Sahamadio, particularly through contacts with government, we now turn to the disadvantaged position of a group of people without named descent groups at all: slaves and their descendants.

In Ambohipo the descendants of slaves lived in a small shabby hamlet just to the west of the main village called Tongotrazo. This marked them out as both belonging to the village and at the same time as being outside it. Their status was not so much of inferiority as of marginalisation.

Slavery has a long history in Sahamadio. The first people to be enslaved were prisoners of war captured in local feuding between hilltop villages in pre-Merina times. The slave population increased greatly, however, as the Merina empire expanded to the south and west taking captive many of the people it conquered and then marketing them in the highlands. Some of these people were acquired by the wealthier landowners of Sahamadio and put to work in their fields. The history of the Twelve Men mentions the ownership of slaves, and refers to them politely - since the word '*andevo*' was highly stigmatised - as 'children of the house' (*zanakantrano*).

The word suggests inferiority, and slaves certainly were considered inferior. But a far more salient aspect of their status - or lack of it - was their marginalisation. This marginalisation was in part a result of their external origins, opposing them to the people of free descent who considered themselves to be 'owners of the land' (*tompontany*). Due to the nature of the social elaboration of the master-slave relationship in highland Madagascar, these outsiders never became integrated over time and through marriage into mainstream society in the way that Miers and Kopytoff (1977) have described for African societies. Instead they suffered a kind of 'social

death' (Patterson 1982), or at least a virtual exclusion from social life. Firstly slaves had no influence or involvement in the legal or territorial organisation of the state (Bloch 1971:71). Secondly, as marriage between slaves and free people was prohibited, they were excluded from the social legitimacy conferred through belonging to named descent groups and through burial in their tombs. They became 'people without ancestors' (Feeley-Harnik 1982,1991). They did not trace descent themselves, and their tombs did not represent particular descent groups: they simply housed the remains of anybody who did not qualify to be buried in a free tomb. So the marginalisation of slaves was geographical, social and symbolic: they were outside the village, outside society, and outside the tombs. It was this marginalisation that was the cause of their inferiority, rather than the other way round. It was also the root of their economic disadvantage.

Under the Merina empire, slaves were not considered to be full citizens. This meant that they were exempt from the obligation to perform *fanompoana* (forced labour) for the state. This exemption meant that the state could appropriate the labour of the free population without precipitating a crisis in agricultural production (Bloch 1980). As we saw in Chapter Two, one form of *fanompoana* was mandatory attendance at school. The exemption of slaves from *fanompoana* meant their exclusion from school, and therefore from what turned out to be a key factor in social and economic advancement. The irony of this exclusion is that, as in British West Africa (Wilson 1966:14), many of the free population were originally so mistrusting of the schools that they enrolled their slaves' children in place of their own. However, when the advantages of schooling became apparent to them they recalled the slaves' children into service and sent their own children to class instead (Xior n.d.).

Although slavery was abolished by the French colonial government, the social relationship between people of free and slave descent endured. On emancipation some former slaves headed off in search of their own land; others remained near their former masters, but lacked land of their own. The presence of a landless rural

proletariat in Ambohipo provided former slave-owning families such as the wealthy Lutheran Ravaliteras with a local workforce willing to sharecrop their fields while they left the village to take up the opportunities offered by the expanding French education system and public sector. The workers the family used were the descendants of their former slaves, no longer bondsmen but sharecroppers who gave up one third of their harvest to their landlords. This sharecropping arrangement was still in operation one hundred years after the abolition of slavery. It was extremely disadvantageous to the sharecroppers since their returns were one third less than those of freeholders. When they were not sharecropping they hired themselves out as day labourers to those landowners who worked in the professional sector, such as schoolteachers or the mayor. One such was Rasoa, who frequently employed the family of Razorza from Amboasary, another slave hamlet close to Ambohipo. Because they were descendants of slaves they owned only a few small scraps of land on which they grew manioc, which was their staple diet since they owned no ricefields. Rasoa told me that her grandfather used to employ Razorza's grandfather to work in his fields. I suspect that the relationship between the two families may have been older still, even dating from the days when people had slaves living on their land employed in a range of domestic and agricultural tasks. Rasoa however, maintained that her family had never owned slaves. Whatever the facts of the past, the relationship between the two families was close and personal, not merely utilitarian. Rasoa offered consistent and generous patronage, finding work for Razorza and his family even in the slack dry season, hiring his sister-in-law even though she was a slow and inefficient worker, using his boys to mind the cattle. In turn, Rasoa was invited to housewarmings and *lanonana* at Amboasary, and received gifts and visits if a family member was sick. That the relationship was not merely monetary was underlined every time the family received their wages. Razorza would give a mannered little speech, humbly asking that both parties be blessed with health and prosperity, and stressing the ties that bound them by

the repeated and conventional use of the inclusive first person plural (*isika*). In a subtle way, Razorza was playing his part in ensuring that the relationship retained a spiritual, personal and sentimental dimension, for had that relationship been founded on money alone his family would only have been as employable as any other. That he could not afford.

But what people like Razorza really needed was land. It was in search of land of their own that people of slave descent emigrated to the mid west, where the government was encouraging settlement. Their social and symbolic marginality in Sahamadio meant that they had no ties to the area: they felt no great tie to the village or the valley since neither were the land of their ancestors. In this respect, at least, they were freer than the people of free descent. As we saw in Chapter Three, those who went west made a complete severance with the place of their birth. They left and they never returned.

Education and differentiation

I have discussed above how status, land, seniority and association with government all contributed to the creation of social and economic differentiation in Ambohipo. All these factors are important, but they are common throughout highland Madagascar. What makes them salient in Sahamadio is that they have enabled certain privileged people to gain access to, and advantage from, the institution of formal education. Conversely, a lack of access to these advantages has prevented others from doing the same. This is why I have discussed these factors at length here. Having given this background, I now consider the role of formal education in widening these socio-economic disparities, firstly in the highlands in general, and then in Ambohipo in particular.

Formal education first made a significant impact in Madagascar under the reign of Radama I. Uninterested by the Christian teachings brought by the early European missionaries, Radama nevertheless was quick to identify the practical application of their knowledge to the expansion of his empire. He saw mission

schools as an opportunity to create an elite group of state functionaries to serve as court secretaries, ambassadors, revenue inspectors, and military leaders (Hugon 1975:82). Having sent his own sons to receive a British education in Mauritius, in 1820 Radama allowed the LMS missionary David Jones to open a school near his palace to which he sent 22 members of the royal family (Brown 1995:135). From these early days of missionary education, schooling was the preserve of the top strata of Merina society (Raison-Jourde 1993:291). Consequently it was these privileged classes which came to form the administrative elite of Radama's new government. The foreign provenance of the state's new knowledge served Radama well, for it added to the air of mystery surrounding state power which was vital to its legitimation and perpetuation (Raison-Jourde 1991:119).

However, the king was also aware that the religious influence of the missionaries' teaching might undermine his authority, which was based upon the sanctity of the royal ancestors. Hence the alliance between Radama and the LMS was fairly precarious, and the king forbade the missionaries from baptising his subjects. After Radama's death Ranavalona I, fearing the growing religious influence of the missions, banned Christian teaching and suspended religious schooling, although she was anxious that the non-missionary Europeans continue to instruct her subjects in useful technical knowledge (Brown 1995:153).

After the death of Ranavalona, the number of missionaries active in Madagascar rose quickly. The administration of the Protestant Church began to grow in scale and efficiency, and links with the state became increasingly close, resulting in the government's conversion to Protestant Christianity in 1869. As the denomination favoured by the monarchy, the LMS was particularly influential in the creation of the government elite: all the new ministers appointed to government posts in 1881 had been trained in LMS schools (Raison-Jourde 1993:292).

The monarchy's conversion to Christianity and the rapid growth of the new administrative elite signalled a deepening schism in

Malagasy society between the urban Christian literate bourgeoisie of the capital and the uneducated pagan peasantry of the surrounding countryside. Proximity to Antananarivo was a vital factor in gaining access to the benefits of European education. Crucial to the growing class distinction was the association of the emergent bourgeoisie with European practices, fashions and forms of dress. Imported fabrics and furnishings became available in Antananarivo and *de rigueur* for the administrative class. Attendance at church entailed wearing European clothes, with the result that the church became not simply a place of worship, but of ostentation (Raison-Jourde 1991:668). Imitation of European mores was the defining characteristic of the Merina bourgeoisie: 'They dressed in the European style, took tea with missionaries, and lamented the ignorance of the heathen masses. They were rich and thought themselves enlightened' (Ellis 1985:20).

So this discrepancy between town and country was behavioural, sartorial, educational and economic. The urban elite developed in two strands: the bureaucratic bourgeoisie controlled government, whilst the mercantile middle class controlled the economy, which was growing exponentially with the empire. On the other hand, the rural populations - particularly the Sihanaka and the Betsileo, who had little contact with Antananarivo - were increasingly weighed down by the burden of taxation, as well as by the costs of lodging passing functionaries and missionaries (Raison-Jourde 1991:668-9). Towards the end of the nineteenth century the rural populations fell victim to a series of infectious illnesses that swept the highlands, whilst urban dwellers remained unaffected. This was seen as the result of the contrast in lifestyles between the clean enlightened bourgeoisie and dirty dark-dwelling peasantry (Raison-Jourde 1991:699), a viewpoint in keeping with the fashionable teaching that a pure heart and a clean body were two sides of the same Christian coin. Such doctrine was part of a concerted missionary effort to identify Christianity with progress, a campaign to which the periodicals *Teny Soa* and *Gazety Malagasy* made a significant contribution.

Christian values and morals became largely accepted by the bourgeoisie. Of course, these 'Christian values' were largely the values of the respectable British nineteenth-century non-conformist lower middle classes. The missionaries' part in bolstering the emergence of a plutocratic state based on slavery may well have caused them some consternation. Whatever their success in Antananarivo, they were aware that their teachings were having less effect upon the rural masses. The LMS hoped to redress this imbalance by using native Christians trained at their theological college as rural evangelists (Ellis 1985:18). These europeanised preachers were largely distrusted by the villagers, who blamed the monarchy's conversion to Christianity for their worsening economic situation. However, the policy of rural evangelisation served the interests of a state which wished to penetrate more deeply into the countryside. By means of the establishment in 1876 of a national system of education, the government had largely usurped control of schooling from the missionaries and put it to their own use to recruit forced labour. Once again it was the rural population who suffered, since - unlike the administrative elite, whose government employment excused them from the draft - they were not able to exempt themselves from *fanompoana*. And they could not afford to bribe their way out.

Merina society had always been divided on ritual and economic grounds, but by the end of the nineteenth century it was more divided than ever. The factor which caused this unprecedented differentiation in lifestyle, knowledge, religious orientation, social status and economic standing was the establishment of formal schooling. The link between class and classroom was evident: whilst the landed higher ranks of Merina society had solidified and expanded their wealth and influence through education at such institutions as the *École du Palais* or the LMS theological college, the rural populace - made up of slaves and middle-ranking peasants of free descent - had become progressively impoverished. This division was a major factor in the Menalamba uprising of 1896 which followed the French conquest (Ellis 1985:148).

The dominance of the administrative cadre by the upper stratum of Merina society presented a problem to the new French government from the moment it established effective rule after suppressing the Menalamba revolt. The government feared that the Merina monopoly of education and bureaucracy would lead to a resurrection of Merina hegemony (Xior n.d.:360). To prevent this the new regime implemented a series of policies aimed at widening access to education on a national level. It also reduced the influence of the missions by instigating a programme of secular education. This policy had the added advantage of reducing British influence in Madagascar, since this was largely represented by the LMS. It also weakened Norwegian influence. The aim of the French colonial government was to create administrative auxiliaries who would form the link between the government and the people, interiorise European values, and submit ideologically and politically to French rule (Hugon 1975:85). As such, colonial education policy was selective and utilitarian, taking the best students and training them for government. But as the educated class was overwhelmingly comprised of the pre-colonial bourgeoisie, the government was forced to make its selections from that class and their descendants. Having removed Merina administrators from their posts on the east coast, the French found they were unable to rely upon local Malagasy to fill their roles. To their embarrassment, the French were obliged to plead with the Merina to return to the coast to resume their former duties (Ellis 1985:144). In ways such as this the Merina continued to dominate the administrative class as a new generation inherited the legacy of their ancestors' educational success under the missionaries (Bloch 1986:163). They grew in wealth and power, status and success, maintaining their advantage through strategic in-marriage within their own class and kin groups (Archer 1976:78; Bloch 1986:32).

The same core group of high class Merina continued to benefit from the post-World War Two extension of higher education to the Malagasy, and from the increased metropolitan investment in the island which followed the 1947 revolt. The pattern continued after

independence, at which time Madagascar featured as one of the most highly schooled of former French colonies (Archer 1976:47). The University of Madagascar was founded in 1963, opening up an even higher stratum of education to be dominated by the Antananarivo bourgeoisie, who also took advantage of further training opportunities in France. Still powerful under Tsiranana, the Malagasy bourgeois elite came to dominate the political scene under Ramanantsoa, whose institutions of state - government, administration, armed forces, justice, economy - were monopolised by the Merina oligarchy. All the major ministers in Ramanantsoa's regime were from the same social, ethnic and educational background, being highly qualified and having received a large part of their education in France (Archer 1976:77,82). A few minor ministries were conceded to non-Merina, but this was simply gesture politics.

Education, then, was the determining factor in concentrating administrative power in the hands of the Merina bourgeoisie in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial history of Madagascar. The haute bourgeoisie were dominant in the highest echelons of professional society as lawyers, owners of industry, top civil servants, important pastors and university professors. They reproduced the conditions of their success for their children by providing them with expensive education abroad and by making marriage alliances with other prosperous and well-placed families. Also part of the urban professional class, but unable to rank with the haute bourgeoisie politically, socially or economically, was the petite bourgeoisie. This class was made up of small businessmen, civil servants, journalists, office workers, teachers in small private schools and skilled technicians. A good education, the ability to speak French, and familiarity with European manners were all important indicators of status which distinguished them from the uneducated majority (Archer 1976:18,23). This was the class which the northern Betsileo penetrated with such success. In this they were assisted by the colonial government's desire to reduce the influence of the Merina by bringing other ethnic groups into the administration. The Betsileo of Fisakana

had all the education and skills of middle-ranking Merina but none of the sentimental or political ties to the former monarchy that so worried the French. Moreover, they were far more ready to accept posts in the provincial administration than the Merina, whose imperial history had made them greatly unpopular with the coastal populations. But the northern Betsileo's professional success was not simply a matter of ethnic politics. The combination of the formidable Betsileo appetite for hard work, the profusion of mission schools in the region, and the siting of an *école régionale* in Ambositra - only 25 miles from Fandriana - had created an educated elite equipped and willing to serve in the lower ranks of the administration. Like the Merina bourgeoisie, this new Betsileo professional class acceded to a level of economic and social status that distanced its members from their rural base and differentiated them socially and economically from their less educated compatriots.

Education and differentiation in Ambohipo

The professional Betsileo class was no longer new when I lived in Ambohipo. The Catholic Mission school, which had initiated the education of so many village luminaries, now lay in ruins beside the church. But its legacy survived through its successful former pupils and their children, who returned to Ambohipo showing all the signs of distinction noted amongst the educated Merina elite of the nineteenth century.

They visited the village particularly at Christmas and during the *lanonana* season, which coincided with the *grandes vacances* from July to September. The young in particular brought their own aura to the village - sartorially and behaviourally - as they went about in their city clothes and confident manner, seeming somewhat showy and brash in comparison to the scruffier, more deferential village youth. One very obvious difference was the matter of footwear, the height of fashion amongst young *ampielezana* being high-soled training shoes or big clompy workmen's boots. One *ampielezana* told me he could no longer go barefoot as he had as a child, for his feet were now too

soft. In the village only the teachers and the mayor wore shoes during the week (on Sundays adults would don flip-flops or plastic sandals), whereas anyone who worked in the fields went barefoot. On the occasion of FITEFIMI's visit there was a basketball match held between young villagers and *ampielezana* for which all the visitors wore training shoes whilst the home team wore none. It was about this time that it became fashionable for the small boys of Ambohipo to draw in biro on their bare feet the trademark logos of the sports-shoe manufacturers. Since the Nike and Adidas emblems they cribbed were themselves taken from unauthorised copies made in Mauritius, the boys were in effect pirating the pirates.

On the morning of that basketball match, a few of the *ampielezana* team came to visit Radolphe's family. On leaving the house one picked up the axe propped against the woodpile and swung it at a eucalyptus log. He missed, scuffing off the bark and burying the axe-head in the earth. His friend took the axe from him, lined it up and took a great swing - accurate this time - which lodged the head so firmly in the log that it took two people to pull it out again. By this time the young men were laughing in self-mockery at their incompetence. 'No, no,' said a third, 'this is how you do it,' as he tried to balance the log on its end before taking a swing which narrowly missed his friend's boot. They looked down at their work: a mangled, scuffed, scarred - but resolutely whole - log: 'Now there's some well cut firewood,' observed one.

They could afford to be ironic: in the town the *ampielezana* - or most probably their house servants - made fires of charcoal, not of wood; they did not have country skills, but then they were not country people. As they meandered off into the village, Nala, a young man who worked for Radolphe, casually reset the log, swung the axe in a fluid arc, and with no apparent effort split the wood cleanly down the grain.

The emulation of European manners and dress which characterised the rise of the Antananarivo bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century was also evident amongst the educated Betsileo

elite of the twentieth century. I once attended a ball in Fianarantsoa organised by natives of Fisakana working in that city. It was a grand affair: tickets were expensive, the drinks overpriced, and the invitations, printed in French, insisted upon 'tenue correcte'. The guest of honour was the then deputy Prime Minister, Heryzo, who was actually from Ambositra, twenty-five miles south west of Fandriana. He sat at a specially reserved table surrounded by minor dignitaries, and sipped Johnny Walker and soda, puffing disinterestedly on American cigarettes as a small battery-powered ventilator on the table before him blew the smoke back into his face. He wore a well-cut suit, which was necessary since he was a large man. A broad-shouldered body guard leaned passively against a nearby pillar. There was a round of rather sycophantic applause the first time the deputy Prime Minister took to the dance floor. He left early.

Heryzo was very much the focal point of the gathering: a smoking, waltzing, whisky-sipping embodiment of the northern Betsileo man made good. On occasions such as this it seemed that the unifying factor was not so much the shared provenance of the participants - although this was obviously important - as the image of affluence and success that they were able to portray to one another and celebrate together. They certainly had more in common with each other than they did with the people who actually lived in the *tanindrazana*.

Within the village, the distinction between educated professionals and peasants was marked by the use of titles, usually derived from French. People who worked for the government or in some other professional capacity were often referred to or addressed using a title corresponding to their position. This was the case even outside of their work context. Thus doctors were called 'Radokotera' (the Ra indicating respect); schoolmasters were called 'Ramosie' (from the French 'monsieur'), not only by pupils but also by adults; the boss of an office would be referred to as 'Ratale' (director), and the president of the *fokontany* as 'Monsieur le Président'. Women who worked as schoolteachers or who held some degree of professional

office, or indeed wives of professional men would be called 'Madame', but this title could never be applied to a peasant woman, whatever her seniority. Use of these titles usually denoted genuine respect for the professional status and achievements of the person involved, and title-holders never used their titles to pull rank. However, these titles could of course be used ironically. One young girl who put on her best dress to go to market and carried an umbrella on a sunny day, was teasingly called 'mademoiselle'. A rather sarcastic nickname used for the mayor - though never to his face - was 'Radoka'; a diminutive form of 'Radokotera', this was a reference to the fact that he had once worked as a vet.

The distinction between professionals and peasants was marked clearly in the difference in income. When I lived in Ambohipo a male agricultural day labourer earned 500 *ariary* a day plus a midday meal and a can of rice worth 100 *ariary*. A village schoolteacher earned 2000 *ariary* - enough to employ three day labourers. Madame Françoise and her husband, Rajosefa, both schoolteachers at the secondary school, employed day labourers to tend their fields. They never went near the fields themselves. The labourers were often former pupils or the parents of current pupils whose own land was not sufficient to provide for their families. Their wages did not buy luxuries, but simply covered everyday expenditure such as salt, oil, sugar and rice. Rice was the most significant expenditure, since the cost fluctuated from 80 *ariary* a can at harvest to 160 *ariary* in the dry season. This seasonal inflation significantly devalued the purchasing power of the daily wage at a time when work was in short supply anyway.

As for *ampielezana*: a university professor earned three times as much as a village schoolteacher; a doctor earned something in between; politicians and civil servants were limited only by the scope of their investments and the bounds of their probity. These high wages had a lot of purchasing power in the village, and much of the revenue from these professional careers was re-invested in Ambohipo, further widening the existing social and economic differentiation. The

investments they made in the *tanindrazana* were economic, social, symbolic and ritual. As we saw above, Léonard used some of his wealth to buy four cows, which represented an investment in all of the above respects. He also bought two ricefields, and some open hillside which he planted with pineapples to sell in Antananarivo. The mayor on the other hand used the financial fruits of his education to build a private school in Ambohipo, re-investing in - and hoping to profit from - the aspirations of a people with a passion for schooling. There could be no clearer symbol of the centrality of education to the social and cultural economy of Ambohipo than the mayor's school.

Conclusion

So for those people who succeeded at it, education itself became a source of advantage which was convertible into further advantageous investments such as cattle, land, or more schooling. These sources of advantage are what Max Weber (1978) has called 'life chances', and they are basic to the configuration of social class. Life chances are of two kinds, both essentially marketable. The first kind are those arising from the ownership of goods and property, which can be traded in the market through profitable deals and capitalist ventures that further increase their potency. The second kind are those life chances arising from the possession of skills and credentials which can be offered on the market in exchange for income; education is one obvious example. For Weber, each of these sets of life chances creates a different 'class situation': one of property holders and one of skill holders (Weber 1978:927-8). Of course, this theory of class was elaborated in the context of nineteenth-century Europe, but it could usefully be applied to the distinction between the mercantile elite and bureaucratic elite in nineteenth-century Imerina.

In Sahamadio, however, these classes were not so mutually exclusive. In fact, property and skills tended to rest in the hands of the same people. The key to continued prosperity lay in engaging with both markets according to the prevailing economic circumstances. Although, for the purposes of discussion, I have treated land, status

and education as separate entities, I must stress that none of these was an independent factor in socio-economic differentiation. On the contrary, these factors were interdependent. For example, the economic potential of land lay not just in its agricultural productivity or sale value, but in its convertibility into other sources of advantage, notably education. The people of Ambohipo were very agile at manipulating the life chances at their disposal according to the economic climate, moving deftly from property to skills and back again. Léonard's family used the income from their land holdings to finance his schooling, and when he became wealthy he used his money to buy more land in the village, and to educate his siblings. The important point to recognise about the history of socio-economic differentiation in Sahamadio is that the source of prosperity has never been constant. During the colonial period Ambohipo derived its wealth from government service. The richest people then were schoolteachers. By the end of the twentieth century, with the state bankrupt, this source of money had dried up and been replaced by the liquid capital to be tapped from non-government organisations, aid brokerage and private enterprise. The key to prosperity has always been the ability to recognise the life chances available in a changing economic climate and then convert into them. Families who did not manage to do this lost out. A comparison of the relative fortunes of the families of Ravophillipe and Rabonifasy illustrates this. The former used their considerable land holdings to fund education for their children, most of whom became successful school teachers in the late colonial period. Some of their wealth was reinvested in showy houses in the village. The latter family, however, continued to live off the land until the land could no longer support their numerous offspring. Their once-grand houses grew shabby, as their life chances diminished.

It is significant that many of the sources of opportunity available were linked to factors emanating from beyond the valley, and usually from beyond the shores of Madagascar. Relations with the outside have always been crucial in gaining and perpetuating socio-

economic advantage. In the nineteenth century, local Betsileo governors in Sahamadio used their administrative position and skills to gain access to the economic networks of the Merina empire, thus enriching themselves with cattle and slaves. The French colonial government brought unprecedented financial advantages to certain educated people from Ambohipo. More recently, access to the financial networks of foreign NGOs has made more than one family rich in Sahamadio. At the same time, those people unable to access these networks - particularly the descendants of slaves - have languished in rural poverty.

The classroom itself was of course a potent foreign presence in the village. Its role in enabling certain people in Ambohipo to access external networks of power, wealth and influence is the critical factor in the recent history of socio-economic differentiation in the valley. I have shown how, both in nineteenth-century Imerina and twentieth-century Sahamadio, education did not democratise socio-economic opportunity. On the contrary, it channelled it towards those people who were already socially and economically advantaged. To return to a statistic I gave earlier: an agricultural labourer in Ambohipo earned one third of the salary of a village school teacher, and one tenth of that of a university lecturer. The financial rewards for educated people who had succeeded in business or the high ranks of government were even greater. In the next chapter I discuss the implications of these economic disparities for social and ritual status, as articulated through the building of tombs and the hosting of tomb ceremonies.

As a preface to this, however, I want first to soften the rather materialistic line this chapter has taken. To do this is to take a more Betsileo view of the processes described above. This view focuses less on material opportunism, and more on characteristics of different kinds of persons.

I opened this chapter with an account of the obvious socio-economic inequalities signalled by the different kinds of housing in Ambohipo. What made this all the more interesting was the disinclination of villagers to remark upon these inequalities or to

discuss them with me. To ask, ‘Who in the village is wealthy?’ was to draw attention to the uncomfortable fact of inequality. The question was met with an embarrassed and tactful changing of the subject. I soon learned not to ask it.

So people in Ambohipo did not talk about difference in terms of material wealth, much less did they account for it, as I have, by identifying individuals’ strategic manipulation of resources. Similarly, they did not specifically rank the local descent groups in a hierarchy of seniority, as did Kottak’s southern Betsileo. Rather, they loosely identified each group with a certain kind of person or activity. So the descendants of the Twelve Men were famous for being *fonksionera* (civil servants); members of the Andriamilanja group were good farmers; people from the Taivato group were known (at least in Ambohipo) as sorcerers with little formal schooling. These were general, not rigid, typologies: not every descendant of the Twelve Men worked in government, nor did being a good farmer make one a descendant of Andriamilanja. But if a man was a good farmer, and if one of his parents was of that descent group, then his agricultural skill might be accounted for by reference to that side of his genealogy. Although nobody was pre-determined to follow a particular career by the fact of their descent, it could nevertheless be said that certain ‘kinds’ of people inherited certain propensities.

The notion that descent imbues persons with particular characteristics, or at least the propensity for particular dispositions, contrasts with the dual nature of Vezo identity described by Astuti (1995). In this model, two incompatible forms of identity coexist: one is achieved through activities performed in the present; the other is inherited from the past as essence. The first kind applies only to the living, who create their identity through performance, the second applies only to the dead, who are identifiable through the qualities inherited through descent (Astuti 1998:31).

But the Betsileo observation that certain descent groups passed on the propensity to do certain types of things suggests a less clear-cut notion of identity than that of the Vezo. Whilst people in Ambohipo

had the potential to make themselves into persons of a different kind than that usually associated with their descent group, there was nevertheless something in a group's essence which, if it did not determine a person's identity, may be said post facto to have guided it. The realisation of this propensity was contingent upon living practice, but propensity and practice were not clearly distinguished as causes by the Betsileo. For example, the fact that Ndrenja always came top of his class was explained to me as an obvious consequence of the fact that both of his parents were schoolteachers. (In fact both parents also had siblings who were teachers, and both their fathers were teachers). Whether Ndrenja's performance was an inherited characteristic or the result of growing up and forming his identity surrounded by a family of educators was a rather grey area. The point was that Ndrenja's background - both social and ancestral - accounted for his academic achievement rather than pre-ordained it.

So in terms of accounting for socio-economic differentiation, the northern Betsileo tended to play down the material resources available to particular lines of descent, and attribute it instead to the propensity for certain identities and statuses. I use the term 'propensity' here because it seems to capture the way that although identity, status, and success in particular fields were contingent upon situated practice, there were nevertheless essential characteristics of certain 'kinds' of person that could also be influential in shaping their identity. These characteristics could remain latent and unactivated: a girl born to schoolteacher parents but married to a farmer might learn to become a good farmer, but she would also retain the latent propensity to become a schoolteacher which her husband lacked. Nothing was fixed by birth or descent, and identity was malleable, but the propensity of descent groups for particular characteristics made certain life courses more probable than others. It may be argued that this was simply influenced by the social and practical environment in which a person was raised: sons of teachers became teachers because they were raised among teachers. But identity was never explained to me in such simple terms. There were certain things about certain kinds

of people that were due to something more than practice. In this light the relationship between the word for 'kind' (*karazana*) and the word for 'descent group' and 'ancestor' (*razana*) is salient. Attributing propensities to certain 'kinds' of people was one way in which the northern Betsileo avoided talking about the material advantages and privileges which have been the subject of the greater part of this chapter.

There was a particular 'kind' of people in Ambohipo, who, rather than being loosely defined by their descent, were strongly defined by their lack of it. These were the descendants of slaves, who, as we saw, did not have named descent groups. The social and ritual marginalisation that came with being 'without ancestors' placed great limitations on their agency. So rigid was their 'kindness' that, unlike people of free descent, they had little scope for making an alternative (non-slave descent) identity through their lifetime. Rather than being guided by descent, these people were fixed by birth. This limitation is inseparable from the economic marginality discussed above. In the next chapter I discuss how the acquisition of economic resources through education provided the possibility for attenuating the most stigmatising elements of this kindness. This is part of a more general discussion of how the acquisition of financial resources discussed in this chapter could be invested in ritual action to further a person's status, influence and chances of becoming a venerated ancestor.

Chapter Five

Ritual differentiation

The valley of Sahamadio was full of tombs. On prominent spurs of hillside stood large whitewashed edifices of stone, dazzling across the valley in sunlight and moonlight alike. Built of granite far to outlast the ephemeral mud or brick dwellings of the living, tombs were a dominant and dominating feature of the human landscape, not sequestered in demarcated dead space, but prominent in the lived space of living people, to be passed when visiting friends and kin, when going to the fields, when coming home in the dark. Some tombs were in the very centre of the village, as in Ambohitraivo, where, dug into the bank, the tomb had become lost behind a two-storey house. The huge tomb in Ambohipo stood like a centrepiece surrounded by the big, old houses of Ambalamahasoia. The people dried their rice and their washing on the single stone slab that made its roof, while underneath lay the ancestors, stacked rigid on their cold shelves, protected from the dripping ceiling by a plastic sheet.

For most of the year the tombs stood quiet and closed, receiving occasional offerings of honey and rum, but otherwise treated with commonplace reverence while the distractions of the living were played out around them. But come the dry season the valley was overtaken by tomb festivals (*lanonana*), the most vibrant social and ritual events of the year. At *lanonana* the ancestors were brought out of the tombs to be wrapped in new shrouds to the accompaniment of singing, dancing and feasting. Not every tomb was opened every year, for holding a *lanonana* incurred great expense upon the hosts. Moreover, people waited for the ancestors themselves to make their needs known, which they usually did by coming to living people in their dreams and complaining of the cold, or simply asking for new shrouds; often it would simply occur to a living person that a particular ancestor, usually a recently dead family member, was about due for re-wrapping. Occasionally the provision of home comforts for

the ancestors would even entail the building of a new tomb. Such projects were undertaken only by those heads of family with the abundant human and economic resources necessary to realise them; they were the mark of an established, prosperous and prolific person. Whilst the building of a good tomb or the hosting of a big *lanonana* testified to the family head's attention to the needs of his ancestors, it also bore witness to his standing amongst his living contemporaries. The significance of this fact is discussed later in the chapter.

For reasons of hygiene, the government only granted tomb-opening certificates in the dry season, which accounted for a glut of *lanonana* between July and October. The fact that the *lanonana* had to be held on an auspicious date, chosen by the *mpimasy*, led to many falling on the same day. The town hall in Fandriana granted 300 certificates for one Friday in August 1998 alone. Our family was invited to five *lanonana* on that one day, so we had to split up into pairs to make sure we were represented at them all. *Lanonana* were very open affairs to which a personal invitation was not necessary. The host would simply announce the date and let word of mouth carry it around, the aim being to provide food, drink and dancing so that as many people as possible could celebrate life in the company of the dead.

Before I realised how open the invitations were, I was hesitant about going to *lanonana*, although I was desperately curious to do so. I was both rather shy and, in a rather unpretentious English way, I was waiting for a personal invitation. Fortunately my family looked after me, and when Ramama heard about the *lanonana* at Bemongo she came to fetch me from Vohitromby. She was wearing her best *lamba* over a cardigan I had brought her from England. I quickly changed my ragged everyday t-shirt for my blue church shirt with a collar. I was glad she had come, for I didn't know what to expect, only that we were going to rebury Dadamona's son in his family tomb. Dadamona's courtyard was full of strangers. A handful of women from Ambohitrinibe, whom I did not recognise, were chattily setting up a row of cauldrons, tempting damp smoky morning-wood into

flame, laying out mats on the swept earth. Some rather shabby and unfamiliar men, related to the Tananomby household and now living in the mid west, took a courteous but slightly drunken interest in my presence. I sat on the grass next to Ramama, who filtered the tide of strangers. They were all friendly, but I was glad to see Raimoa, whom I knew. He had come straight from the fields, and his legs were still shining where he had washed them in the river. A very old lady told Ramama that she was surprised to see a *vazaha* sitting on the ground. Did I not want a chair?

Actually, there was nothing I wanted less. I felt conspicuous enough as it was. The comfortable familiarity of the village I had spent six months getting to know had been fractured by the intrusion of all these strangers, friendly as they were. And to cap it all I was expected to sit on a special chair like a colonial District Commissioner (for such was the very old lady's experience of *vazaha*). 'No, he doesn't need a chair,' said Ramama, 'he's one of us.'

To my relief, something started to happen. From the road below came singing, and then a crumpled Malagasy flag appeared over the brow of the bank, followed by a shaky-looking bier improvised from a short ladder, held precariously aloft by four sets of swaying arms. Dadamona's son, wrapped in a white shroud and enclosed in a mat strapped tightly to the bier, was returning home for burial in his father's tomb. Still singing, the bearers entered the yard in a lurching dance - two steps forward, one step back - and dropped their load in front of Dadamona's house.

An old man began to speak. 'Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen. Do excuse me, really,' he shouted over the milling crowd. Some people listened, others continued talking. The elder spoke some rather long-winded preliminary phrases about ancestors and ancestral ways. 'Here we are, many people come together from the north, from the south, from the east, from the west - scattered people from everywhere. It is good we are together, for together we are like a rock, separated we are like sand.' Then he called forth all the guests from the Ambalamanga descent group to sit on the mats. This they did,

about forty of them, huddled together like refugees on a raft. They sat looking up as two old men and the very old woman took it in turns to say a few words of blessing, and sprinkle drops of water over them from a Chinese tin plate. They cowered and giggled and wiped the droplets from their faces. Then a mischievous elder took the plate and emptied it fully over them in one shining fluid sheet, sending them scattering across the yard.

Unity and fissure

This chapter examines ideas of unity and separation in the light of the social and economic differentiation characteristic of Ambohipo. I intend to investigate beneath the rhetoric of unity proclaimed above. Quite rightly, this rhetoric has informed previous anthropological understandings of the Malagasy tomb. The unitary symbolism of the tomb is indeed potent, but here I wish to show how tombs also articulated fissure and separation for the people of Sahamadio. The previous chapter has traced the roots of social differentiation in Ambohipo. Although not the original cause of social and economic inequality in the village, success in formal education has been instrumental in widening the gap between rich and poor. In Chapter One I described the material circumstances and life histories of a range of villagers in order to convey the extent of this phenomenon. The difference in housing styles was one visible manifestation of these disparities. This chapter discusses how the economic and social differentiation discussed so far was translated into ritual differentiation through the ability to build new tombs and host tomb ceremonies.

This perspective conflicts with my initial perceptions of the symbolism of tombs in highland Malagasy society. And, as we saw above in the description of my first *lanonana*, it conflicts with the kind of rhetoric used by the northern Betsileo at their tomb ceremonies. This continually stressed themes of unity, togetherness and inclusiveness. Illustrated with florid metaphors and weighty ancestral verbosity, the oratory delivered at *lanonana* was persuasive: ‘Those who are together are like a rock, those who are separated are like

sand.’ This kind of rhetoric reflected the apparent sociality of *lanonana*, as the disparate particles of vastly extended and scattered families reassembled in the *tanindrazana* around their symbolic core. There, via the elders, they received the blessing of the ancestors, and in the process of being together and eating together they strengthened ties of kinship with people they had not seen for years, or perhaps didn’t even know were kin, if they knew them at all.

The notion of unity around the tomb is central to our understanding of highland funerary practice and general Malagasy social practice (Bloch 1971). Tombs serve as fixed symbols of the unchanging ancestral order in a world where acquired status, power and wealth are continually redistributed. People are free to live dispersed, fluid and unancestral lives because they will eventually be fixed in the tomb at death (Bloch 1971:137). As markers of descent, tombs are the antithesis of dispersal, since they regroup the scattered members of the descent group and fix them there in perpetuity (Bloch 1986:84).

The model of the unchanging ancestral order evoked through tomb rituals may have symbolic relevance to dispersed modern Malagasy, but it is only a model, and a model of an ideal world at that. Rituals based around tombs are merely expressions of what Leach (1954:15) has called ‘the system of socially approved proper relations between individuals and groups’. Leach’s point is similar to Bloch’s: that rituals serve to create an illusion of order and moral value on the random mayhem of social reality, ‘momentarily making explicit what is otherwise a fiction’ (1954:16). In this chapter I wish specifically to concentrate on the way that northern Betsileo ritual activity was not simply a model of ideal society (though it was in part), but largely an articulation of the social flux and differentiation that it has been said to deny.

Nevertheless, to focus on the unifying aspects of the tomb is useful because it throws into relief the fluid nature of life. This is particularly true as regards descent groups. As long as a person is still alive, descent group affiliation in highland Madagascar is notoriously

malleable. It is 'achieved' rather than 'ascribed' (Southall 1986:417), 'optative and non-exclusive' (Kottak 1971:189). Enterprising individuals can reap benefits simultaneously from rights derived in multiple descent groups. As with the northern Betsileo, though perhaps to a greater degree, Merina property and rights are conveyed bilaterally (Graeber 1996:210). However, at the level of tomb groups, affiliation is not so flexible, since people need to decide which tomb group they intend to subscribe to and thereby make an investment in (Bloch 1971:116). But even this is not conclusive: contributions of money and labour may be made to more than one tomb group during a person's lifetime. However, once a person dies and is buried in a particular tomb, their affiliation is fixed for eternity. It is then, and only then, that descent is confirmed (Bloch 1971; Astuti 1995).

It is this area of affiliation that I wish to consider in light of the social differentiation encountered in Ambohipo. While from the point of view of Betsileo rhetoric and the ideal ancestral order beloved of the Merina, tombs were symbols of unity and inclusiveness, they could also be seen as divisive and exclusive, catalysts of fissure, conflict and jealousy. Rather than uniting descent groups, tombs were the principal causes of segmentation. I argue below that this is a direct result of their role in ritual differentiation, which is itself a manifestation of inequalities in people's ability to attract and manage social and economic resources.

As descent is fixed at death, tombs are markers of segmentation. Choosing to build a tomb is a segmentary act, since it is a repudiation of all the existing tombs at one's disposal. The same applies to being buried. The observation that segmentation in Madagascar occurs at death - or at the earliest in preparation for death - contrasts with analyses of segmentation in Africa. Classic studies of African lineage systems highlight the political consequences of segmentation for the living. Amongst the Nuer described by Evans-Pritchard (1940), lineage fission and fusion are expressed in political and territorial terms. When segmentation occurs it is usually due to shortage of environmental resources available for herding cattle. This

lineage fissure is conceptualised geographically rather than genealogically. Marwick (1965) reveals the relationship between segmentation and witchcraft amongst the Cewa of what was then Northern Rhodesia. In a matrilineal group, accusations of sorcery are attempts by segment leaders to gain overall control of the matriline. Sorcerers always attack their own relatives, and the matrilineage is the natural arena for disputes about succession to office and disposal of property. Once division has started, accusations of sorcery accelerate and justify the division. Middleton's (1960) study of the Lugbara of Uganda firmly attributes segmentation to the quest for authority. Segmentation occurs at the death of a senior elder as ambitious men contest both the redistribution of authority and the re-ordering of genealogies, which are unfixed and debatable. Older men have an advantage here because they are able to bolster their claims for authority via the authority of the dead, which they obtain ritually through invoking their own line of ancestral ghosts.

In the cases cited above, lineage segmentation is the result of contested authority and political activity amongst living kin. Segmentation in African society is largely about the status of the living; in Madagascar it is generally about the status of the dead. Being a successful ancestor depends on the accumulation of wealth and progeny, and the transformation of these into ancestral capital that will outlast the mortal existence of the individual and will carry their memory into the future. Leadership of lineage segments in life has no real meaning since segmentation occurs only at death. Renown as an ancestor - which is best achieved by being the founding ancestor of a successful lineage carrying one's name - is, it is hoped, eternal. Yet success as an ancestor is necessarily reliant upon a person's wealth and success when alive. In Sahamadio, where there was great social and economic differentiation caused by unequal success in formal education and access to its benefits, the building of tombs and the hosting of tomb rituals were honourable means of demonstrating living wealth, and necessary precursors to the attainment of high ancestral status. But as such they were also socially dangerous.

Despite the rhetoric of inclusiveness, these activities were undercut with tension and jealousy.

Tomb building

The building of Raivony's tomb illustrates this point. Raivony was in his sixties with a large family. All but two of his twelve sons and daughters had married, many nearby, and so he had a pleasing number of children and grandchildren to look upon and think upon as he spent his frail later days minding his geese on the sunny eastern bank of the valley. The great sadness of his life was the loss of his youngest son, aged twenty, to a mysterious stomach complaint in 1997. It was a combination of these factors that led Raivony to consider building a tomb. He was a patriarch with his progeny spread out before him. Using the combined wealth of his offspring - many of them educated and successful *ampielezana* - and the efforts of neighbouring kin, he could build a tomb to house his ancestors, himself, his offspring, and, in particular, the son he mourned so deeply, who still lay in a temporary grave waiting for entombment.

To the northern Betsileo, there was no more important building than a tomb. Whereas brick, timber and thatch would suffice for a house, a good tomb could only be constructed of one material throughout - granite. It was a question of durability: whilst houses were expected to last a lifetime, tombs were designed for eternity.

The site chosen by the *mpimasy* for the new tomb was half way up the eastern bank of the valley, where it would be clearly visible from the other side, facing west, as all tombs did, into the setting sun. The bedrock that was needed lay unquarried several hundred feet higher at the very top of the bank. The only way to fetch it was by cart, using oxen specially trained to cope with the weight and the gradient. This was complicated by the fact that there was no cart track leading to the quarry. So five tons of granite had to be brought half a mile down a steep track, which did not yet exist. Then the foundations would have to be dug, the huge stone slabs lowered in, the external walls built up, a hinged stone door fitted, the roof put on, a cross

mounted on top, and the whole thing painted white. All this using only spades and iron bars and the unpaid muscle of friends and kin.

Communal work

The first thing I heard of this project was one morning when Ralex came to our house to invite me to help in the work. He had been all around the village gathering a workforce. The next day a group of twenty men gathered on top of the hill at the quarry, and with great ingenuity and industry a rather precarious track was made down to the tomb site a mile below. Over the next three months, other work days were set aside and announced in Ambohitrinibe and Ambohipo. Those men and women who were free joined the work party: the men did the heavy work, and the women prepared and served the food, and carried up basketloads of sand from the valley bottom. After we had made the track, another day was spent on the monotonous job of digging foundations: sixteen foot long by eight foot wide and six foot deep. Some of the men stood in the hole itself chucking out endless shovelfuls of soil, and the rest were at the side shovelling away the spoil, making a great red stain down the bank. A further two days were needed to bring down the rock and build up the walls. At the end of each day we would sit back and admire our work. Raedy, the leader of the work party, would give a short speech of thanks and admiration: 'It is wonderful to see what can be done by co-operation. This was the way our ancestors worked and it is fitting that we should do like this now. May God bless us all and the work we are doing. May everybody have good health, for we are all kin here and that is why we help each other.' Dadamona, the most senior of the work party, would respond, and he too asked for God's blessing on the work and the workers. Then a bottle of rum was brought out by Naivolava, the Ambohipo rum dealer, and once Dadamona had drunk, Raedy went round the party distributing draughts. Such, said Dadamona, is the ancestral custom (*fombandrazana*) at the end of the day's work.

Having fetched the rock, dug the foundations and built the walls, the final task was to put the roof on. This task was the epitome

of the collective effort that had brought the work this far. Instead of each man working with his own spade to make the road or dig the hole, now the collective force was concentrated into lifting the great stone slabs on top of the tomb to form a roof. As these were six foot long, three foot square and of dense granite, this required a greater degree of co-operation, co-ordination and unity than ever before and made the task particularly demanding and satisfying.

The mood was boisterous and lighthearted as the slabs were levered towards the tomb using iron bars and wooden stakes. Other stakes were laid in the stones' path as runners. The levering was coordinated by shouts of 'one, two, three - heave' and multivocal tactical advice: 'to the east it bit, gently does it', 'mind your toes' (nobody was wearing shoes). Sometimes it was decided to lift the rocks manually, so the stakes and bars were slid underneath and with at least one person on each end of the eight stakes the rock was borne staggeringly towards the tomb. Raivony potted in the background in his baggy green jersey full of holes, murmuring encouragement. Each rock lurched towards its destination to the accompaniment of raucous singing, which could be heard right across the valley: 'This stone is light, we could take it to Manakara [one hundred miles across the forest!]

Once brought to the tomb, the slabs were placed on wooden props leaning diagonally from the ground to the top of the tomb wall. Chains were attached to the rock and then ropes to the chains. Some men stood on top of the tomb and hoisted, others pushed from underneath. When the rock reached the apex there were shouts of 'easy does it', as careful adjustment was needed. There was a strange atmosphere of concentration and jubilation, the mixing odours of sweat and rum, the potential of life and the imminence of death. Songs swelled up from the work party: 'Do you have a brother-in law?' 'Does your sister have a son?', songs only sung at the building of tombs, and which celebrated marriage, fecundity and the extended family. The final placement of each rock was celebrated with loud

cheers. From his place on the bank, his chin propped on his walking stick, Raivony watched with an approving smile.

Most of the participants shared in advising and strategising, but there was one voice to which everyone deferred: that of the mason, or, as he was dubbed by the workers, the *technicien*. This was an intentionally ironic title, playing on the fact that ‘technicians’ were usually experts in the kind of foreign skills least associated with the ancestors. The mason was a professional, and therefore the only salaried worker. When he whistled, everybody stopped and listened and followed his advice. He was young, small and extremely thin and he moved among the stones like some kind of tomb sprite, measuring with his string, chipping with his hammer, overseeing with his guile and experience of rocks, which were far more important than the strength he lacked.

The hoisting and carrying of the rocks went on until all thirteen were in place on top of the tomb. To celebrate this, libations of rum from a kitchen cleanser bottle were splashed over the rocks. Now it was time to fill in the cracks with the small stones collected by the women and with cement mixed in a hole in the ground. The group split into two, some filling in from above, others plastering from the inside. Dadamona, who had been working away inside, perched on one of the shelves, plastering the inner walls and helping himself to kitchen cleanser, emerged to rail the outside party for not pulling their weight. It was good-hearted banter, meant as entertainment and taken as such: ‘Look at you lot, you’re just pretending to work; we’re the only ones doing anything around here’. Everybody enjoyed this pantomime. There was a general levity of mood, children milling around, small boys trying to lever an enormous boulder with stakes far too big for them, women joining in the laughter.

Inside the tomb the work intensified. The anthemic singing of proverbs and church choral songs rang out from the packed tomb like a jubilant underworld chorus: ‘Sing as you work and it’s finished with no effort’. ‘Co-operation is strength’.

In this way, the communal work of tomb-building was brought to a close. Over the following weeks the finishing touches were put in place. A cross was mounted on the roof. The mason crafted a hinged door with a hidden stone locking device of which only Ralex knew the workings. Then he carved symmetrical patterns into the walls and shelves, and painted them in relief. Ralex and I spent a sunny morning whitewashing the walls. Though only six feet high, the tomb shone out across the valley, brighter than any other. Above the door were carved and painted the first and last dates of construction: we had built the tomb from start to finish in three and a half months; some tombs stood unfinished for years. And on the door itself: 'Torimaso no fiadanana' - sleep is peace.

As I have described it, the process of building Raivony's tomb would appear to represent the epitome of collective effort. All individual short-term projects seem to have been subsumed in the communal task of working for the transcendental ancestral order (Bloch & Parry 1989). I have described it in this way because people really enjoyed the work and, at one level, the tomb really did unite the community. But there was more to it than happy harmony. Having given the brighter picture of tomb-building, I now turn to its darker side, as I identify the tensions and jealousies that undercut the euphoria of the tomb's construction and the revelry at its inauguration. We switch our attention from the harmonious choruses ringing out across the valley and listen instead for the strains of dissonance and discord that underscored them.

Discord and jealousy

The first of these arose during the early stages of the construction of the tomb. Word came to me that Raivony's half-brother (same mother, different father) had been heard complaining one drunken evening to his family about Raivony's aloofness and the fact that he had a *vazaha* helping him.

I was disturbed on hearing this. It is natural for anthropologists to be sensitive about the effect their presence may have on community

relations, and here I seemed to be stirring up trouble in a family. However, Ralex assured me that the tension was long-running. Raivony had prospered better than his half-brother, and had even given him some ricefields. This only made matters worse, for it led to accusations that Raivony thought himself superior. One night Raivony dreamt that the half-brother's sons had put a charm in his fields, which would bring lightning down upon his house. Another time his mother came to him in a dream to warn him that people were trying to interfere with the new tomb. He called a meeting of close family, who agreed to do all they could to prevent any ill-intentioned meddling, particularly at the tomb inauguration ceremony, when the tomb would be open for the ancestors to be installed in their new home.

On the evening of the tomb's inauguration there was a great party at the tomb. Darkness had fallen, a bonfire blazed across the valley, and the pipes and drums and singing called out to the people of the valley. There were shrieks and whistles as the guests started to dance a wild thronging stamping dance, dancing off the cold. A wailing descant arose from the women, answered by a chanting masculine bass. By the light of the fire, the ancestors were raised from under their mats, where they had lain the whole afternoon in the drizzle. Hoisting them onto our shoulders, we danced them round the tomb, tripping and sliding in the mud, clattering dead and living bones together, swigging from a jerry can of rum. Seven times we danced around the tomb, seven times in and out of the gully dug to the tomb door. Then we stumbled one last time to the doorway, the crowd above the pit still dancing, spraying rum, singing 'veloma e, veloma e' - goodbye, goodbye. One by one the ancestors entered the tomb, head first, head to the east, rested at last on their huge stone beds. Their tomb was warm with the breath of rum, the fresh stony smell of yesterday's cement, the moving shadows of the living and the dead. Guests piled in to look, and Ralex showed them round, his pride disguised by a casual modesty. The crowd lunged in and out of the doorway. Then the lamp was withdrawn and the living withdrew to the dancing, drinking, chanting crowd outside in the night. And with a

great heave of his skinny arms the mason pulled his door to, cemented up the gaps in the jamb, took his flute from his back pocket, and joined the party once more.

It had been a great party, a wild send-off, seemingly full of drunken good will. But I found out later that there had been trouble. In the darkness, as Ralex was showing off the interior of the beautiful new tomb, two unwelcome guests had crowded in at the door. These were two sons of Raivony's half-brother. Nobody had seen them at the main ceremony, but now here they were, eager to see inside, pressing in with the throng. They greeted Dadamona, but he refused them entry, suspecting they were hiding something under their coats. There followed a terse altercation, which was drowned by the singing and revelry. But Raivony knew he had been right to be cautious.

The accusation against the half-brothers' sons was serious: that they had been planning, through the use of charms, to bring death to the family through the tomb. This was witchcraft. Now, it is possible that Raivony's accusation was unjustified. He could, as it were, have dreamt the whole thing up. But even if his accusations were groundless, his suspicion was understandable. In building a tomb, Raivony was making a statement about his status in the community: he was proving himself a man of means. He realised that this statement made him subject to others' jealousy, not least from his disenchanting and unprosperous half-brother. Rather than the tomb uniting kin, it was actually driving them further apart.

Heads of tomb groups

Rich and influential men such as Raivony were always in a difficult situation with regard to their kin. By attracting people anxious to demonstrate kinship links with them, they made natural heads of tomb groups (Bloch 1971:118). This could be a problem in two ways. Firstly, it risked attracting the malevolent attention of the jealous, as we saw above. Secondly, poor relations were a drain on resources without bringing much to the glory of the tomb or the kin group. As I was preparing to leave Ambohipo, one successful *ampielezana* was

conducting the delicate business of explaining to a peasant first cousin that he did not intend the new tomb he was planning to embrace both branches of the family. He was, in effect, elbowing out a poor relation, and laying the foundation for descent group segmentation.

Raivony's half-brother was right: Raivony was giving himself the airs of a rich man. But that's what rich men did - they built tombs. And through these tombs they committed their memory to the care of their many and prosperous descendants. In this way they hoped to become important and celebrated ancestors - *razambe*.

In Madagascar, wealth has been shown to be the making of great men. Wealth is potency. It is also associated with fertility, which is why it converts so well into cattle and tombs. It is a prerequisite of the *mpanjaka* of Sahafatra: whatever their seniority in the kin group, if they cannot provide cattle for ritual occasions then they will not hold office (Wooley 1998:176). For the Merina, a successful life entails not simply the acquisition of wealth, but also its transformation into offspring (Graeber 1996:213). For the Betsileo of Sahamadio - and no doubt for the Sahafatra and the Merina also - the aim of a successful life was a successful death: becoming a *razambe*.

But not everyone could become a *razambe*. Unlike the Merina, who spoke openly of the desire to be *razambe* (Graeber 1996:210), the northern Betsileo were more modest, or at least more covert in their aspirations. Speaking openly of such desires would be construed as showing off, and risked provoking the jealousy of the ancestors. Building a tomb was a way of pleasing the ancestors through a communally approved action which at the same time had positive implications for the individual status of the builder. Not everyone could build a tomb. It was not an activity for young men, or poor ones, or resentful half-brothers. Raivony built his tomb because he, as a living man, had a large family around him; he was established as a progenitor of standing. A man in his twenties, whatever his wealth, could not have embarked upon such a task. The communal building of the tomb was a demonstration of the human resources at Raivony's disposal. The fact that he could build a tomb using unpaid labour

proved that ties of kinship were greater, in this case, than financial incentives. The euphoria that propelled the whole project was continually accounted for by the fact that this was 'communal work'. The singing that rang out across the valley was vocal evidence of Raivony's ability to mobilise the community, his community.

Of course, this was all underpinned by the monetary means at Raivony's disposal. Although the workers came free, their food did not. The considerable wages of the mason, the hire of the specialist carters, the bull slaughtered for the inauguration, the gallons of rum - all had to be paid for out of Raivony's wealth. But this was not wealth saved up in a bank account, or hoarded under his mattress. The funds at Raivony's disposal were not his own - in the narrow sense - but those of his children and grandchildren, many of whom were *ampielezana* earning salaries in town. Without the remittances of these secretaries, gendarmes and schoolteachers, the tomb could not have been built. Raivony's task as patriarch was to pool these economic resources from this network of supportive kin. A significant portion of these funds was provided by Raivony's sons-in-law, who formed a special group.

Just as the money required for building the tomb was channelled into the project through the network of kin, so was the physical effort. The strength, the vitality, the vigour needed to shift and place the huge slabs of granite were not actually Raivony's - he was a frail old man who walked with a stick. But the effort, like the finance, was his inasmuch as he could summon it from his descendants.

So the wealth of elders and ancestors was only really theirs in that it was at their disposal through the extended network of their offspring. Likewise, their long-term renown was reliant upon the prosperity and renown of the generations that succeeded them after their death. But at the same time, that prosperity was dangerous to those ancestors because it enabled new tombs, further segmentation, and the making of other, more recently renowned ancestors. The apparently harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship between

the living and the dead was underscored by tensions between the two parties. Living people might rely on the blessing of the ancestors for their own prosperity, yet in prospering would also push them aside to make space for themselves as *razambe* (Graeber 1995).

Differentiation and tomb style

I have shown how the act of building a tomb risked inspiring resentment in kin both living and dead. It was the very fact of Raivony's ability to build a tomb by mobilising human and economic resources that was a catalyst for the suspected jealousy of his kin and the potential jealousy of his ancestors. Now I wish to show how particular methods and features of construction could signal social differentiation. In the case of the Ravalitera tomb I want to draw attention to the nuances of style, the choice of location, and the salaried employment of labourers as markers of social distinction. In Chapter Three, I described how the main tomb in Ambohipo was both overcrowded and poorly maintained. There was a reason for this neglect. Unlike agricultural migrants, who moved away and eventually buried their dead in new tombs in the new land, the large number of educated migrants from Ambohipo still regarded the valley as their *tanindrazana* and still continued to bury their dead in the same tomb. Naturally, the tomb became crowded. Also, the descent group had grown so large and dispersed that the organisation of maintenance had deteriorated along with the tomb itself.

The Ravalitera family resolved this problem in their own way. After three generations of government service, they had become one of the wealthiest families in Ambohipo. Although they did not live in the village, they returned there for family burials. With this in mind, Ravalitera Samoela had once come back from Antananarivo with a pair of binoculars, which he used to pick out a prominent stretch of land on which to build a tomb for his family. Some years later his son hired a party of masons and charged his nephew Rageorges with their supervision. Work on the tomb began.

But things did not go according to plan. During the construction, there were three deaths in the Ravalitera family. This was thought so inauspicious that work on the half-finished tomb was called off. It was decided that the ancestors were unhappy with the choice of site, so the tomb was demolished and building began again a little further to the west, near to the Lutheran church. As the Ravalitera family were a substantial part of the Lutheran minority in the village, and pillars of the Lutheran church, this location was read as a clear statement about denominational identity. This time the tomb was completed without further deaths. It was an unconventional structure, and rather grand. It had only shallow foundations, and stood tall above ground level. Just below the roof, in the end walls, were iron grilles for ventilation. A locked iron gate stood across the narrow porch. This architectural innovation was remarked upon, but not approved or copied.

Difference and distinction could be read into every aspect of the Ravalitera tomb. Rather than being built by the labour of kin, hired hands were used. This betrayed the rather uncomfortable fact that the family had more money than kin in the valley. Leaving the old leaky tomb to the Catholic majority in order to relocate near the Lutheran church introduced denominational politics into the realm of the ancestors. The European architectural features were not simply signs of social distinction: the locked iron gate was a potent symbol of segmentation and exclusion. This distinction and differentiation is attributable to the influence of formal education. The money for materials and labour all came from the salaried employment of the educated Ravalitera expatriates. The design features reflected the influence of European taste, acquired through living outside the *tanindrazana* in Antananarivo and France. Thus, the quintessential symbol of the *tanindrazana* - the tomb - was largely a creation of influences external to it.

Lanonana

The hosting of tomb ceremonies, like the building of tombs, was a socially approved activity, for the acknowledged objective was to give honour and respect to the ancestors. But *lanonana* - although ostensibly about the unity of the community - also revealed the inequalities of wealth characteristic of the village. Again, the ideal of unity was betrayed by the reality of differentiation. In the next section I show how people's differing ability to host ceremonies reflected their material wealth. There is nothing surprising in that. But what it reveals is how economic capital acquired through education could be converted into social capital through the hosting of a ritual. I show this by comparing two *lanonana*. In the first, there was not the economic means to make this happen; in the second, the ritual activity was part of a wider bid for social status.

Lanonana at Amboasary

In Chapter One I introduced Ravao, a poor widow living in Tongotrazo, the part of Ambohipo home to the descendants of slaves. Ravao had still not re-wrapped her husband since his death two years previously. The problem was that she could not afford to host her own ceremony. She had to wait for someone else to hold one, and then wrap her husband while the tomb was already open. The certificate from the mayor's office alone was beyond her means.

Her opportunity came when Razorza and Rabina from Amboasary held a *lanonana* for their daughter and grandchild, who had died the year before within a month of each other. Like Ravao they were of slave descent. They buried in a shabby tomb hidden away on the edge of a wood. It served as a rather indiscriminate burial place for people of slave descent from the whole valley. They were united in the tomb through the stigma of their status, rather than through marriage or blood.

So Razorza planned a *lanonana*, and I gave Ravao the money for a shroud so she could wrap her husband when the tomb was open. But there were problems with the paperwork. The mayor operated a

rather idiosyncratic system of issuing permits. He gave Razorza a special discount rate of about 75% off the normal price, but he insisted that since he needed to witness the tomb-opening in person, it would have to take place at 8:30 in the morning on his way to work.

This meant that Razorza's *lanonana* was not a vibrant sunlit midday spectacle like most. Rather, it was a sombre affair, subdued by the early start and the morning mist. The spiders' webs were still white with dew when we arrived at the tomb. The mayor was already waiting, satchel in hand. So we started.

Two men hacked at the cement sealing the tomb. The trees dripped on us as we watched, quietly conversing. Rakotobe the leper helped himself from a small offering of tobacco left on the tomb. Rabina's daughter was unearthed from a plot at the tomb side, and a smell of death arose like a whiff of dead fox. The form of her body showed through the muddy cloth. There was still flesh: the soft roll of her breasts. A skullish face strained at the shroud. Then the dead woman's daughter was dug up. She had been five when she died. Now, as Rabina held her, she was like a baby in her grandmother's arms. The small bundle was placed with the large, and mother and daughter were wrapped together, the child fitting snugly where her mother's belly no longer was. Rabina stood and watched blankly. Then, slowly, her shoulders heaved and she began to sob.

It was still only mid-morning. Once the tomb was resealed, the mayor slipped away to the office. Rasoa and I, as honoured guests, were invited for a meal of fatty pork and rice in Rabina's smoky hut. As we left, some young men were sitting on a log getting quietly drunk. 'There' said Rasoa, as we walked home to pick up the day again, 'that's how the poor do *lanonana*.'

It seemed they had hardly done it at all. There was no music. There were very few guests. Rabina and Razorza had invited Rasoa because she was their employer. But apart from Rasoa, the mayor (and myself) there were no other people of free descent. The hosts could not afford to invite the people of Ambohipo even if they had wanted to

come. There were no speeches. There was no talk of the unity of the descent group, for the descent group did not exist.

Lanonana at Tsimola

Tsimola sits half way up the bank on the western side of the valley of Sahamadio. The four houses are tall, tidily built structures of packed mud, roofed with neat thatch. There is a pleasant central yard with fruit trees for shade. The ox-pen is deep and secure. Terraces of pineapples fill the bank that faces across to the crumbling walls and frayed rooves of Tongotrazo, a short walk to the south.

The *lanonana* was held by Dosy and his brother to celebrate the removal of his ten-year-old son from a temporary grave on the hillside into the family tomb. When we arrived, it seemed that most of Ambohipo had made the short trip across the fields and were enjoying the music and dancing in the yard. The drummers and pipers stood against the walls of the house in the narrow shade of noon, each wrapped in a floral lamba the size of a bedspread, their straw trilbies tilted forward onto their foreheads as their silent eyes roved about from underneath the brims. From the circling crowd dancers stepped forward, the women moving with shuffling steps, fluttering their hands and kicking up dust with their heels. Two women danced in a mock karate fight, as the crowd stepped in and placed banknotes in their dancing cleavages.

We ate lunch off shared plates on mats in the yard, the servers circulating with buckets of fatty pork ladled from a bucket with a tin mug. The music and dancing went on, and more people arrived from Ambohipo. Naivolava took up a position on the bank, surreptitiously selling rum from a small container under his jacket. Suddenly the pipes and drums left the yard and went marching up the hill, led by a waving flag. They were followed by the women of Tsimola dancing and twirling through the tall grass with the bright white shrouds held above their heads, surrounded by excited children.

The tomb had already been opened and four men were digging beside it. From a small grave they pulled out the bundled body of a

child, dusted off the soil, and sprinkled it with a few drops of rum. Three larger bodies had been taken from the tomb and laid on a mat beside the grave. With great concentration the child was rolled up into a parcel with these adult corpses as a gang of small boys jostled past each other to watch. Then another child was taken from the grave and wrapped with second adult, the wrappers crushing the sticking-out bits to fit the parcel better, rolling it all as tight as they could and fastening the bundles with twine. The band was still playing, recorded by a boy with a radio-cassette hooked up to a car battery. When each parcel was wrapped, it was taken up and danced around clumsily and taken back inside the tomb. Rum was decanted from a Castrol can into a Coke bottle, and then splashed over the corpses. The sun shone on the fir trees, on the flag, on the watching crowd, on the small brick tomb and the dancing people. With the bodies back in the tomb, the wrapping-mat was tossed into the air and a group of young men wrestled over it, until one tugged it loose and hurtled off down the bank pursued by the others holding up his prize. He would sleep on it that night, in the hope it would bring him children.

Superficially, there was nothing remarkable about the *lanonana* at Tsimola. The standard components were all present: the communal eating, the music, the wrapping the ancestors at the tomb. But the interesting thing was what was missing. There was no gathering of the descent groups, and no blessing by the elders of the assembled kin. The reason for this is that there was no descent group to be blessed - for the people of Tsimola were not of free descent. Tsimola was an offshoot of the hamlet of Tongotrazo, home to the descendants of slaves. Although they were notably more prosperous, they shared the same stigma of descent - or rather, lack of it. They did not have a descent group on which to shower the blessings of the ancestors. This was a standard element of every free *lanonana*, but not at Tsimola. Instead there was an extended period of music and dancing. When we ate, it was not in our descent groups, as at Dadamona's *lanonana*, but on a first-come-first-served basis. In this way the whole issue of descent was circumvented.

Although Dosy and Raimoa, the hosts, did not have a descent group, they were acquiring other ritual trappings of the free. This *lanonana* was a step in that direction. Raimoa, unlike most people of his background, had succeeded at school. He had even become a teacher at the mayor's defunct Development School. Then he had married one of the director's daughters. Her family naturally opposed the match, and severed ties with her. The couple relocated to Antananarivo where they both worked as teachers. With the money they earned there, and the wages of the itinerant Dosy, the little family group at Tsimola slowly grew wealthier. They bought some pasture and terraced it for a cash crop of pineapples. They built the tomb on the brow of the hill. It was small, modest, only made of brick, but it meant they no longer buried their dead with the people of Tongotrazo in the dank shabby tomb at Amboasary. And finally, they had hosted a *lanonana*, attended by a significant proportion of the free population of Ambohipo. The people of Tsimola were moving up in the world, leaving Tongotrazo behind. Without Raimoa's educational achievement and employment as a schoolteacher it is unlikely he would have married the director's daughter. Without the remittances from the couple's teaching jobs in Antananarivo the *lanonana* could not have been so lavishly hosted.

Lanonana and status

The *lanonana* at Tsimola shows one way in which money earned outside the valley could be spent on the pursuit of status within it. Studies of activity around ancestors in Madagascar have tended to concentrate on how this activity articulates with traditional modes of production (cattle, rice, land), rather than on the links with money and capitalism (Middleton 1999:32). One purpose of this chapter has been to underline the importance of external sources of wealth to ritual activity in Sahamadio, foremost of which was the professional employment available only to educated people.

As I showed in Chapter Four, the people of Tsimola, Tongotrazo and Amboasary, as descendants of slaves, owed their low

status to their social and ritual marginalisation. People of free descent and people of slave descent stood in relation to each other as closed castes (Weber 1978:933), distinguished by clear - and supposedly infrangible - status distinctions. Two of these were particularly salient. Firstly, the free ritually sanctioned marriage with descendants of slaves through the expulsion of offenders from the tomb group. Secondly, people of slave descent did not have grand stone tombs like the free, but rather shoddy communal ones. Nor did they have ancestors and descent groups as the free would recognise them. In this way, the free maintained a 'monopolisation of material and ideal goods' (Weber 1978:935). The hosting of the big *lanonana* at Tsimola was part of a wider project by that family of breaching the boundaries that enclosed them in their caste situation.

The way they did this was by participating in the patterns of consumption most central to the status of people of free descent. The fact that they did not splash out on ephemeral commodities such as cars and houses, but spent their money instead on a tomb of their own and a showy *lanonana* to which they invited as many people as they could (including many of free descent), reveals the centrality of ancestors to the relationship between consumption and status. However, while the tomb and the *lanonana* were marks of distinction that distinguished them from their poor relations at Tongotrazo, these things did not hold great sway with the free population. As long as people in the valley knew of their origins, they would continue to be classified as a certain 'kind' of person, and therefore constrained existentially by their innate essence.

Conclusion

The modest shift in social status which the people of Tsimola achieved through hosting a *lanonana* could not have been achieved without access to networks of economic support beyond the valley. Successful tomb ceremonies and tomb-building required the large-scale mobilisation of resources. As the previous chapter showed, there were very few resources available inside the village. The Ravalitera

family's new tomb was funded entirely from their professional income. The *lanonana* at Tsimola drew heavily on the salaries of two absentee schoolteachers. And Raivony's tomb, although built by kin in the valley, was financed by the remittances of his urban offspring.

All the above examples show how the political economy of Sahamadio articulated with its ritual economy. Now, while the political economy of Ambohipo drew largely on sources outside the valley, its ritual economy was planted firmly within it. A similar situation has been described by Bloch for the Merina, who put money earned outside the *tanindrazana* to moral purpose by spending it on rituals of regrouping to atone for the group's dispersal (Bloch 1989). Certainly, to spend money on tombs was a morally approved activity in Sahamadio. The main purpose of rituals conducted around tombs and ancestors was to ensure the transmission of the ancestors' blessings and fertility onto the living community. But the fact that some people had significantly more money than others to spend on these venerable activities meant that economic differentiation inevitably translated into ritual differentiation. To finance the rituals of care and reverence for the ancestors was to obtain a degree of control over the flow of blessings and fertility that emanated from the tomb. Bloch (1986) shows how the possession of such ritual authority by the royal family in nineteenth-century Imerina was an essential element of the political management of the state. The political advantage to be gained through ritual authority in twentieth-century Sahamadio was minimal in comparison, but it had implications for the status of individuals.

These ritual inequalities undermined the unificatory symbolism of the tomb expressed so frequently in ritual rhetoric. It has been one aim of this chapter to demonstrate how, in many ways, tombs were not symbols of the undifferentiated ancestral order, but vehicles for the articulation of the distinctions and fissures characteristic of a differentiated social world. My stress has been on the tensions and contentions of ritual activity. I do not refer solely to tensions between persons, though these were real enough. I refer also to the way that

individual motivations existed in dynamic tension with communal action. That is to say, how the ritual construction of the ideal egalitarian ancestral order created opportunities for the advancement of personal status or the social ambitions of sub-groups.

The central paradox of Betsileo tombs was that it was impossible for the tombs and tomb groups to be as communal, egalitarian and internally undifferentiated as they were publicly purported to be. The fact that certain patriarchal figures and wealthy individuals necessarily took control in the financing and organisation of tomb construction negated the egalitarian ideal, and created the potential for internal tensions amongst living kin. The reported sniping and malevolent interference of Raivony's half-brothers is one example of this. Also, the establishment of tombs and tomb groups necessarily entailed and reflected social division amongst the living, as the exclusive European-style mausoleum built by the Ravalitera family shows. These contradictions between the unifying ritual symbolism of the tombs and the divisive social processes inherent in their creation leads us to the paradoxical conclusion that tombs were vehicles for the very fission they were supposed to obscure.

Moreover, tombs were not internally undifferentiated. The maxim that 'nothing must deny the undifferentiated collectivity of the dead' (Bloch & Parry 1989:28) was contradicted by the way in which the differentiated agency, importance and status of living (or once-living) persons found its way into the tomb. Notably, some people became *razambe* - important named ancestors with a shelf of their own in the tomb. These *razambe* might also give their name to a whole descent group, thus making their multiple descendants the vehicle for their individual renown. In this context it is interesting to note that the same word - *razana* - was used to denote both individual ancestors and named descent groups, suggesting the simultaneous singularity and plurality of *razambe*. So, amongst the undifferentiated collectivity of the dead there were some ancestors who, through their status as *razambe*, did not fade into dusty obscurity but persisted in the public consciousness through the activities of their descendants. A good

example of this is the prosperous farmer at the time of the Merina empire who gave his name to one of Sahamadio's main descent groups. Amongst his descendants was a family who ran a daily taxi-brousse service to Antananarivo, which I occasionally used. On the back of their buses they painted in large red and blue letters the name of their descent group and apical ancestor: Andriamilanja.

Just as tombs articulated the tension between the individual and the communal, so did they present contradictions between short- and long-term processes. Bloch (1989) describes Merina spending on tomb ceremonies as in part a means of converting money from the short-term life cycle of individual acquisition into the long-term ancestral order of the tomb. Thus although the tomb is opposed to the short-term cycles of individual enrichment, it is also partly dependent on them. Ritual differentiation occurred in Sahamadio because educated people were more able to subsidise the long-term ancestral order than were non-educated people. Tombs, especially newer ones, were associated generally with the group that built them, and specifically with the head of that group. Although Raivony's tomb was a collaborative project, the old man himself was the single person most closely associated with it. One particularly grand new tomb in the valley, founded and funded almost single-handedly by a local politician and successful businessman, was already referred to by the name of its founder, even though he was still alive. The short-term associations that living tomb-builders had with the tombs they built always had the potential to become long-term, giving them a prominent place in the ancestral order. A successful life could lead to a successful death. This was perhaps their intention, although the associations were liable to fade over time.

So the individualism necessary to the tomb-building process was never fully disguised by the apparent communal inclusiveness of the tomb. Despite the communal effort required to build a tomb, there was a central organising figure. Despite the plurality of a descent group's descendants, there was usually a single apical ancestor who was remembered through them. To be either the head of a tomb group,

or a putative apical ancestor, or both, it was necessary to be both wealthy and influential. It was also necessary to be a man, for I never heard of a woman of either status. It was to wealthy and influential men that lesser kin attached themselves in order to ensure their own place in the tomb, as Bloch has shown to be the case in Imerina, where heads of tomb groups divide into three categories: heads of local families with land; civil-servants whose money and connections with government make them influential amongst their kin; and rich men whose wealth encourages people to demonstrate kinship links with them (Bloch 1971:118). In Sahamadio, land in itself was no longer a route to wealth. As we saw in Chapter Four, the rich and influential people in Sahamadio were those with strong connections outside the valley, usually through education. This created the paradoxical situation whereby the ancestral order was sustained by people living in places furthest removed from the moral authority of the *tanindrazana*. In Chapter Three I showed the importance of the local landscape as a vehicle for this ancestral authority. This chapter has shown the importance of ritual action in the *tanindrazana* to people leading their lives and making their living away from it. The theme of the moral authority of the ancestors and ancestral land is taken up again in the following chapter, which explores the links between morality, *tanindrazana*, and a socially constructed idea of ancestral knowledge and practice.

Chapter Six

The moral environment of the land of the ancestors

One evening at Vohitromby, as the last of the sunlight slanted onto the cowshed and chickenshed, and Paosy and Bora pounded the evening's rice, I watched from the balcony as Raso'a's three young fieldhands, barefoot and lean, legs muddied, spades shouldered, ambled into the yard. They sat down on the wall of the oxditch, sharing a draw of raw tobacco rolled in a leaf of schoolbook paper. Raso'a came out with a tin plate of pineapple.

'You must be thirsty. Who's the eldest of you three boys?' Ignace stepped forward, wiping his hands on his shorts. Raso'a held out the plate with two hands.

'Thank you.' Ignace took a dripping slice of pineapple in his two hands. Then Marcelin stepped forward, thanked Raso'a, helped himself in two hands, and stepped back. Then Théo did the same.

'So' laughed Raso'a, 'Théo's the youngest. The youngest but the tallest.'

'The tallest and the silliest,' quipped Marcelin. Théo aimed a fake kung-fu kick at him and Marcelin skipped away, almost dropping his pineapple.

'That's enough, you two,' grunted Ignace. 'Sorry about these two, Raso'a,' he added, smiling, but only half joking.

Knowledge, place and conduct

Such small dramas of seniority were integral to social life in Ambohipo. In this chapter I will show how such actions constituted a practical moral knowledge that was considered the legacy of the ancestors, and which could only be acquired through living in the *tanindrazana*. I will describe how the social memory of the ancestors as moral beings was transmitted in the physical landscape of the valley, and how working in the ancestral fields was in a sense a moral act. This helps to explain two things. Firstly it puts into context the

building of big houses by *ampielezana*, which I argue was in part a form of compensation for their absence from the ancestral land. Secondly it prefaces Chapter Seven, which is about the kind of unancestral knowledge gained in the classroom and beyond. These two chapters together examine northern Betsileo ideas of local and foreign knowledge. This is essential to an understanding of the role of knowledge in social differentiation in Ambohipo.

The following two chapters explore the reasons why, despite the opportunities it provided and the skills it taught, education was seen to have a negative effect on young people. The way this was expressed in Ambohipo was through a discourse on knowledge and the provenance of different kinds of knowledge. This is how Rajean-Ba, who had three school-age children of his own, explained it to me one evening as we were putting the oxen in their pen for the night. He was chewing a mouthful of tobacco, which he spat out in small black spurts to punctuate his phrases. 'The children,' he said, 'learn all sorts of things at school (spit). They know maths (spit). They know reading and writing. But they don't know good behaviour and they don't know manners (spit).' The point Rajean-Ba was making was a simple one: the children were learning technical skills (reading, writing, arithmetic) but they were not learning social skills; they were not learning to be good, wise Betsileo adults. The technical knowledge acquired at school was not the same as the social knowledge acquired in the community. Schooling in the narrow sense should not dominate over education in the broader sense. I heard Rajean-Ba's perspective voiced frequently by adults in Ambohipo, and although it took various forms, the central notion was always the same: local social knowledge, which, as the moral legacy of the ancestors from times past, could only be acquired in the *tanindrazana*, was opposed to the foreign knowledge learned at school, which took children away from the moral and social environment of the valley. Thus the parents of Ambohipo faced a dilemma: school provided a future for their children, but it posed a challenge to their past.

The way I want to elucidate this dilemma is through an examination of Betsileo ideas about different ways of learning, knowing and acting in the world, and how these ways were associated with particular places and with a particular parochial concept of morality. The view of knowledge I present below is admittedly a folk model (Holy & Stuchlik 1981), a local epistemology which explains a local quandary, rather than a general anthropological theory of knowledge. Its importance in the context of this thesis is that it explains how different 'kinds' of people were seen to be created through the learning they achieved in different places associated with different kinds of knowledge. This topological folk theory of knowledge is crucial to the thesis because it provided one idiom through which people talked - or, rather, avoided talking about - the social, economic and ritual differentiation which education created in the village.

In Chapter Four I mentioned the disinclination of villagers to remark upon these inequalities or to discuss them with me. I think this was because making such comparisons might be read, in the case of a poor person, as evidence of jealousy or covetousness, which could lead to the suspicion of witchcraft. But a discourse on knowledge articulated around notions of place avoided these pitfalls, and at the same time introduced an element of moral judgement into the equation. Along with ideas of place, morality was at the basis of this Betsileo epistemological framework.

The northern Betsileo social construction of knowledge characterised knowledge as either basically social or basically technical, a dichotomy that would be incompatible with much recent anthropological theorising (Lave & Wenger 1991). Technical knowledge was referred to as *fahaizana* (see glossary), a term which covered any skill and technique of a practical nature, be it swimming, sewing or sorcery. *Fahaizana* was savoir-faire, the ability to make things and do things: play chess, speak French, mend cars. The counterpart of *fahaizana* was a kind of knowledge oriented around social interaction, conduct of the person and local customs. The

Malagasy word for this is *fomba*, commonly translated as ‘customs’ or ‘ways’ (see glossary). I argue here that northern Betsileo thought of *fomba* as a kind of social knowledge, that is to say something learned in the social environment of the *tanindrazana*, something people needed to know (*mahalala*) in order to behave appropriately in village society, to adhere to social conventions, and to be considered responsible and respectable individuals. Betsileo *fomba*, it will be noted from this brief schema, contained a particular moral perspective. This was because it was considered the legacy of the ancestors.

Fomba was not particular to the Betsileo. Every kind of people were seen as having their own *fomba*, and *fomba* was attached as much to a place as it was to the people that lived there. By living in Sahamadio I slowly cast off my European *fomba* and acquired knowledge of Betsileo ways, which I demonstrated in my conduct and manners as I gradually became more integrated. Betsileo who went to live in Antananarivo or France learned the *fomba* of those places. The location of Betsileo *fomba* in the *tanindrazana*, and its inheritance as the legacy of the ancestors, imbued it with a strong moral force that opposed it to the *fomba* of *vazaha*. I discuss this more fully below. *Fahaizana*, on the other hand, was considered neither moral nor immoral, but amoral: technical competence did not have an intrinsic ethical dimension.

Fahaizana also had associations of place, for although people in Ambohipo demonstrated all sorts of technical competencies, it was striking that they usually considered *fahaizana* to come from abroad, particularly Europe. This connection was most clearly made with regard to the facts learned at school. In Chapter Seven I discuss this further, and show the historical and social associations of school *fahaizana* for the northern Betsileo. First, though, it is necessary to discuss more fully the moral dimensions of Betsileo *fomba* as practised in the land of the ancestors. This is the main subject of this chapter.

Fomba

Crucial to an understanding of Betsileo *fomba* as a kind of social knowledge is its moral dimension. It was moral in two connected ways. Firstly, it was seen as the basis of harmonious social life. Secondly, as the inheritance of the ancestors, it contained the force of ancestral authority. This connection will become clear as I present some ethnographic examples of *fomba* and the learning of *fomba* in action. To know *fomba* was first and foremost to know good manners.

Manners - as we saw at the beginning of this chapter - were a fundamental aspect of social life in Ambohipo. I am not the first non-Malagasy to remark upon this. The Jesuit ethnographer Dubois noted 'the exceptional courtesy of the Betsileo in their relationships' (1938:236). My own brother, visiting me briefly in Ambohipo from England, was similarly impressed, though more effusive: 'They must be the politest people in the world,' he said. That a non-Malagasy speaker should note this shows the extent to which Betsileo courtesy was conveyed through action, and not just through words. I shall illustrate some of the principal elements of Betsileo *fomba* below, and it will be noted how they are basically practical in expression. Politeness, in terms of deference and respect to others, was seen as crucial to a harmonious society. As such, a person's adherence (or non-adherence) to prescribed forms of conduct and courtesy was a reflection upon their moral character. The organising principle of Betsileo *fomba* was the recognition of precedence given to seniority. This involved showing particular respect to living elders, but also to ancestors, who were the most revered members of the community.

Issues of seniority were prevalent whenever Ambohipo villagers ate together. In our house, we ate strictly in order of age: Rasoa would take the rice off the fire and then serve it onto tin plates on the mat. After the prayer she would serve herself and her husband, Rajean-Ba, with sauce before passing the bowl in my direction. I would help myself and then pass the food on to Bora, aged fifteen, who would help herself and then pass it to Paosy (thirteen) and so on to Bida (nine). Nobody would eat before Rajean-Ba had picked up his

spoon and then we would all start in descending order of age. If I did not pick up my spoon, neither would - nor could - Bora. Occasionally I would test her by slowly, painstakingly helping myself to chilli or by talking absentmindedly but not starting, to see if she would begin without me. She never did.

It was common for families in Ambohipo to have as many as ten or more children. I noticed that whenever friends introduced me to their siblings they would present them not as 'my brother' or 'my sister', but as 'our elder sibling' (*zokinay*) or 'our younger sibling' (*zandrinay*). This is because people thought of their siblinghood as a chain of age-based relationships. Introducing their sibling as *zoky* or *zandry* signalled that relationship to me and therefore often gave me an indication as to my standing in that chain. With this information we would know how to behave appropriately towards each other.

As a member of my Malagasy family I was not simply a brother to my ten siblings, but a *zoky* to some and a *zandry* to others. This fact determined very strongly the manner in which we related to each other. Ten years older than my youngest brother, I was partly responsible for his university tuition fees, and I also gave him pocket money for clothes, as did his other older brothers. But as my *zandry* he had to run my errands, carry my bags and make himself available to assist my research at the time I appointed - even if it meant walking home at dawn from a party in Fandriana.

I was bound by the same ties of obligation to all my elder siblings. For example, whenever Solo, five years my senior, had to walk to catch a bus, I would accompany him and carry his bags. To some it was a bizarre spectacle to see a *vazaha* carrying a Malagasy's bags. To those who commented, Solo would simply explain: 'He is my little brother so he carries the luggage'. This was invariably approved of as appropriate Betsileo behaviour, but often with a sense of wry irony at the reversal of the colonial power relation.

The carrying of luggage by the *zandry* was elaborated in the context of gift-giving. When going with my eldest sister, Rasoana, to take pineapples to affines across the valley, it was my role to carry the

fruit and hers to give the little speech of prestaton. The formula for this was ‘The junior carries the luggage, the senior carries the talk’, or alternatively, ‘If you have an elder you are relieved of the problem of speech, if you have a junior, you are relieved of the problem of baggage’. Of the two tasks it was speaking which required the greater skill, technique and maturity. There was weight in words, and so the responsibility of rhetoric and social interaction lay squarely on the shoulders of the *zoky*. Physical burdens, on the other hand, were the lot of the youthful and vigorous.

Mutual respect and respect for seniority were also demonstrated by the practice of stooping and apologising when passing in front of other people. In order to pass before another person it was polite to bend forward at the waist and flex the knees into a low crouch whilst pointing one arm forwards in the direction of the floor, a practice common in south-east Asian societies. The gesture of stooping and bowing served as a repudiation of the seniority implied by placing one’s head, albeit momentarily, above another’s. Thus it was more important for young people to crouch when passing their elders than vice versa. If my father passed before his grandchildren playing on the floor, he simply said ‘excuse me’, bowed slightly and stepped past. But in passing his older sister (aged 75) he would make a greater show of stooping. And when his grandchildren passed him, or any adult, they often did so with elaborate, overstated and sometimes rather noisy courtesy, as if showing off their good manners.

Another similar piece of Betsileo *fomba* that I learned was the form for passing people on the road. As young people tended to walk more quickly than older ones, they were often obliged to overtake. Both on narrow paths and wider tracks it was considered disrespectful to pass an elder on the road without asking permission. The form was predictable and formulaic. The younger person was supposed to greet the elder first. Greetings exchanged, the passer would make a rather humble apology: ‘Excuse me, but would it perhaps be okay to go ahead slightly as I’m in something of a hurry?’ Then the elder would reply, ‘Go ahead, the way’s clear,’ perhaps adding, ‘it doesn’t matter,

for you are young and fast.’ It was also considered good form to offer to carry an elder’s baggage, but many older people complained this practice was dying out.

As an anthropologist striving to make myself - or at least my manners - invisible, I noted these forms of formal conduct assiduously and tried my best to emulate them. Some people made better models than others, as Rasoa liked to point out to me. The examples she used set educated people in opposition to less educated ones: her little brother, a university student, knew less *fomba*, she said, than her cowherd, though they were the same age. Similarly, she contrasted the behaviour of the village hoodlum, Batota, with that of her two young agricultural labourers, Ignace and Marcelin. The educated Batota was a dissolute, often drunken and frankly fairly annoying young man who had once been to lycée in Fandriana until he got his girlfriend pregnant and was forced to withdraw. Ignace and Marcelin, by contrast, were calm and deferential in their manner, modest in their opinions and moderate in their habits, spending their evenings smoking and chatting on the ruins of the Catholic mission, where they apparently posed no greater threat to the virtue of young females than the occasional flirtatious teasing.

The behaviour of young people educated in town was frequently remarked upon if they visited Ambohipo. One young couple attracted great disapproval for walking through the village arm in arm. This was indeed very un-Betsileo behaviour, for in village life members of the opposite sex never showed signs of physical affection in public; in fact even married couples seemed barely to acknowledge their mutual connection when outside their own home. The young couple, in their clean jeans and white trainers, were seen as bringing the ways of the town to the country, and this implied a negative judgement.

When people in Ambohipo made such comparisons, it was usually to point out the detrimental effect of schooling on the *fomba* of the village youth. Now clearly not every educated young person was badly behaved, nor was every less educated one a model of good

Betsileo conduct. Nor did every educated returnee omit to stoop before his elders: some did, some did not. The important thing about such comparisons was not whether they were a true reflection of the effects of schooling, but that they posited Betsileo *fomba* as a specifically Betsileo cultural trait - a local moral knowledge clearly differentiated from, and opposed to, non-local *fomba*.

This knowledge was both embodied and explicit: I learned it both by doing it, until it became second nature, and by hearing it pointed out to children and to myself. I think the Betsileo acquired it in the same way. When people saw me observing *fomba*, in a way that they were not used to seeing Europeans behave, they commented on how I had become a Betsileo - albeit a white one: to know how to behave was to practise *fomba*, and to practise *fomba* was to be Betsileo (cf. Lambek 1993:152). Manners, as it were, made the man, and manners were not so much something you had, as something you did. Knowing *fomba* was doing *fomba*.

Although I showed my integration through the practice of the *fomba* I learned, my participation in village life as an observer and writer-down of Betsileo behaviour led me to question whether I was learning by the same process as the people of Ambohipo themselves: was I learning Betsileo ways in the Betsileo way? The world of normal human intentions, actions and feelings that are taken for granted by the people under study, can tend to appear as a script to be transcribed to the note-taking anthropologist (Shore 1996:43). Thus a field worker thinking about the acquisition of human behaviour might be tempted by the classical structural approach that sees social practice as evidence of an underlying system. In this view, the child learning to bow and stoop before her elders, or to wait for her big sister to eat before she did, would merely be internalising, mechanistically, a given cultural script. This would go on until she arrived at a point of full socialisation, knowing what she needed to know in order to behave as a functioning member of her society (Holland & Quinn 1987:4).

This normative approach is vulnerable to practice-based theories of social learning. Rejecting the idea of pre-supposed models,

these theories stress instead how learning is acquired through practical involvement in the social world, in 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991:43). In this view, to enter such a community, as I did when I went to live in Ambohipo, is not to assimilate an existing code (although it often seemed like that to me as I assiduously noted and copied behaviour), but to enter into an evolving set of relations between social actors, of which I was one. My interaction with people of all ages, my recognition of seniority, my knowledge of some conventions and ignorance of others, my various faux pas (such as peeking inside a cooking pot out of curiosity) were all part of the dynamics of the practice community. So were those of other villagers. Interaction was the basis of the learning of *fomba*: when Radolphe's grandchildren stooped low to pass him, their deference was bodily evidence of their knowledge of relative social values (Keane 1997:13).

This example reflects well Bourdieu's (1977) observations, developed from Mauss (1935), on how social learning involves the incorporation of physical dispositions which become inscribed in the 'habitus'. One way that people learn is by unconsciously imitating the actions of others, so that practical schemes 'pass directly from practice to practice without moving through discourse and consciousness' (Bourdieu 1990:74). Of course, social learning does also occur through discourse and consciousness, and one way this happened in Ambohipo was through the correction of children's behaviour. As we have seen, the adoption of certain postures was a key element of practical sociality for the Betsileo. I remember how Rasoa took much of the responsibility for teaching manners to her five-year-old niece: if Rina sat inelegantly, Rasoa would disapprove; when the little girl accepted food in one hand, her aunt told her to use two. Thus, by naming and identifying correct and incorrect behaviour, and by expressing approval and disapproval, Rasoa was responsible for Rina incorporating a set of practices into her posture and demeanour. In the eighteen months I knew Rina, I noticed how Rasoa had ever less need to comment upon her behaviour, for her posture grew more structured and predictable during that time. As Rina became socially adept, and

social skills became incorporated into regular dispositions, the explicit rules of *fomba* were dispensed with because they had become remembered as actions (Connerton 1989:83; Ingold 1993:462).

The increasingly stable and predictable nature of Rina's behaviour is characteristic of Malagasy notions of maturation. During this process, people gradually become more defined, as they mature from the pliable mental and physical state of infancy into the hardened constitution and stable demeanour of elders (Bloch 1993:96). In so doing they gradually become more like the ancestors, and this is what gives their acquired behaviour an infusion of morality.

Thus the teaching of *fomba* to children through example, observation and prompting was a lesson in the practical morality of the ancestral order, an example of how 'an implicit pedagogy can instil a whole cosmology' (Bourdieu 1990:69). *Fomba*, in recognising the precedence of elders, choreographed in human action the moral authority of the ancestors. This worked in two ways. Firstly, as the ancestors were the most senior of all elders, observing the precedence of seniority in day-to-day actions was physical recognition of their ultimate authority. Secondly, Betsileo *fomba* were viewed as quintessentially ancestral practices: to know *fomba* was to engage in a practical legacy which was taken as the basis of a moral ordering of society. To the people of Ambohipo, then, whether they followed them or not, these practices of *fomba* were not arbitrary conventions, but value-laden performances. A young man carrying an elder's baggage made physical a moral value; if he did not take up the load, then his inaction was morally negative. So, the idea of the moral authority of the Ambohipo ancestors was incorporated into the bodily dispositions acquired by people living in the *tanindrazana*, even though much of the time this was not remarked upon. As noted above, it was usually when *fomba* were not observed that the ideas and rules about it were made explicit. This discourse frequently arose as a critique of young people or of *ampielezana*, that is to say people who had become disengaged from the practice of Betsileo *fomba* due to their

involvement in the social realms of the school and the exterior. This will be discussed at length in Chapter Seven.

The time of the ancestors

The importance of the *tanindrazana* as a domain of ancestral activity was a constant theme of my discussions with older people in Ambohipo, such as Rageorges and the schoolmaster Rantoine. Rageorges was a serious old man who lived with his brother's widow on the ground floor of his father's house, where we would often sit in the afternoon gloom talking of the history of the valley. All the big works - the dykes and the main irrigation channels - were planned and executed by the community together, Rageorges once told me. In those long-ago ancestral days, government worked from the twin bases of community (*fiaraha-monina*) and co-operation (*firaisankina*). Decisions were reached by a process of communal debate to which everyone had access. After all opinions had been voiced, the elders gave their adjudication. This process relied upon the mutual respect and appropriate social conduct of the participants, on the one hand, and the wisdom (*fahendrena*) of the elders on the other. The elders' wisdom was founded not only upon their status as mature social beings but also upon their knowledge of sound governance inherited through ancestral heirlooms such as proverbs and taboos.

According to Rageorges, this decision-making process laid the basis for the organisation of the communal labour which built the valley of Sahamadio. The dykes and ditches, the flood channels and the flow retainers were planned and built by the community so that the fields of individuals might prosper. It was such a process, Rageorges told me, that was responsible for a group of fifty men from Ambohipo climbing one dark night up to the spring on the hill at Angavo and digging away the land, changing the course of the brook from north to south overnight so that it watered the ricefields of Ambohipo instead of those on the other side of the hill. This operation was evidence of ancestral sagacity, foresight and cunning. The legacy of ancestral governance and co-operation now flowed in the very water that

irrigated the fields of their descendants. It was visible in the ditches and dykes that directed that water. It was witnessed in the landscape.

When people in Ambohipo talked about such projects it was as if they talked of a golden age. I tried, in vain, to get them to put a date to this. Rajean-Ba suggested it was maybe the seventeenth century, but he was only trying to answer me in my time-scale. No, the time was simply ‘in the time of the ancestors’ (*faharazana*), an unspecified time before colonial rule or central government, before the present day: in the good old days of the good old ways.

This rose-tinted rhetoric of the ‘time of the ancestors’ was constructed and perpetuated as a kind of homage to them: it was the correct and reverential way to talk of one’s seniors, the rhetorical equivalent of stooping to pass an elder, or of wrapping an ancestor in a new shroud. Also, this ideal vision of ancestral society acted both as a trenchant critique of the ills of modern post-colonial society and as a blueprint for its rectification: mutual respect, the observance of hierarchy and the honouring of the ancestors had governed a productive and harmonious community in the past; they provided a practicable plan for personal and social moral conduct in the present.

Rantoine, a teacher at Ambohipo primary school, explicitly contrasted the ‘time of the ancestors’ with the state of modern Betsileo society. He blamed the passing of the co-operative ancestral days and ways on the political and moral interference of the French colonial government. In his view, the system of taxation and the instigation of local political boundaries which cut across ties of kinship were particularly disruptive. ‘Today,’ he said, ‘everyone just takes for themselves.’ Social transformations often lead to ‘invented’ traditions (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992:4), and this hyper-traditional notion of Sahamadio’s past could be read as a socially constructed response to the loss of political autonomy under colonial rule. But, as we saw in Chapter Two, political autonomy had already been lost under Merina occupation. The irony is that the large-scale engineering works which created the distinctive landscape of Sahamadio were actually achieved at the behest, indeed under the coercion, of the occupying Merina

empire in the early nineteenth century. Rather than taking executive decisions based on the common will, local elders were really implementing imperial dictate.

Furthermore, much of the 'communal' labour was undoubtedly supplied by the valley's slave population, who were not entitled to ownership of individual fields. Subjects of coercion rather than partners in co-operation, slaves were central to the engineering project but marginal to its benefits. The partiality of the dominant local narrative of Sahamadio's past is typical of the oral narratives presented in Chapter Two, which, as the discourse of the free population, neglect the histories of those 'people without ancestors'. I was reluctant to ask the people of Tongotrazo to talk to me about the creation of the rice plain for fear that such talk might evoke 'painful memories' (Graeber 1999). When I casually asked Michel about it, he mumbled that he didn't really know. Nor did his father, who referred me to the mayor.

Perhaps there was no social memory of this time amongst the descendants of slaves. The parts of history that people forget are just as significant - possibly more so - than those they choose to remember (Bozon & Thiesse 1986). In considering the social formation of memory, it is vital to consider the means and acts by which memory is transferred (Connerton 1989:39). As I showed above, this could be done through discourse, through explicit evocations of a bygone age having political and moral implications for the present (Lambek 1996:239). However, traces of the past can be found not just in discourse, but in the physical environment itself, and in people's social relations within it (cf. Werbner 1998:3). The landscape in which the ancestors lived was the principle means by which the social memory of their society was perpetuated. Rather than just being reconstructed through cycles of political and moral manipulation and reinterpretation (Halbwachs 1950), social memory in Sahamadio was etched permanently into the earth. Rageorges' account of diverting the spring to irrigate Ambohipo's fields transmuted social memory from discourse into ditches, from words into water. For people of free

descent, who owned ancestral fields in the valley, the moral memory of the past was carried in that water and fixed in those fields. The descendants of slaves, owning no fields of their own, had no stake or interest in this version of the past: having no ancestral lands in Sahamadio, they had no ancestral memories there either.

Working the land

In Chapter Three I discussed how individual family fields contained the toil of previous generations, and how this was a factor in people's reluctance to sell them, even if they were moving away. Radolphe remembered his youthful days spent with his father turning the pasture of Tsimola into paddy fields; he wanted this land to pass on to his own children, and to be farmed by them, although this was looking increasingly unlikely, as most had done well at school and left the village for work in the city. The land was full of memories and aspirations. His relationship to his own land featured an element of personal morality: he would not sell his father's labour, nor did he wish to sell what he hoped would be part of his children's future. It is important to realise, then, that the moral authority of the ancestral land lay as much in individuals' relationships with individual ancestors (parents, grandparents) and (unborn) descendants, as it did in the more general notions of the distant 'time of the ancestors' and their communal work. From both a personal and a community perspective, the labour of the ancestors was perceived in the land itself (cf. Feeley-Harnik 1991:3; Cole 1999:203).

And the social memory of the ancestors was conveyed and sustained not just through perceptions of the landscape, but through habitual actions within it (Connerton 1989). Working in the fields - digging, planting, weeding, harvesting - made physical the relationship with ancestral ways and times, aligning the intentions and practices of living people with those of their forebears. As rice fields were quintessential ancestral creations, rice production was a quintessential ancestral activity.

Eating that rice was also particularly significant. Every day in our house we ate the same red rice, much of it grown in our fields from the previous year's seeds. The sharing of rice in south-east Asian societies denotes the sharing of substance (Carsten 1997:111), so to consume the red ancestral rice of Sahamadio was to share substance with the ancestors. This is something which differentiated wealthier families of free descent like my own, from poorer slave-descent families. Short of ricefields, the latter were invariably short of rice, and often ate manioc instead, a filling but insipid root vegetable also used as animal feed, and having none of the ancestral connotations of rice.

Central to the activity of rice cultivation - particularly for men - was the use of the spade. I learned a lot about spades during my time in Ambohipo. Everyone had their own preferences for style, weight and quality, but the basic model was always the same. The blade, or 'tongue', was long and narrow, ideally of unriveted steel forged from recycled railway tracks; the six foot handle was greased with ox tallow, polished with use and tipped with a steel balance to give added weight if necessary. When I proudly brought my new spade home from Fandriana market I was lauded for my choice: a top-of-the-range, long-tongued, unriveted *mangasoavina*, actually chosen for me by my brother-in-law. That, said my friend Michel admiring my spade, is what makes a Betsileo a Betsileo.

Of all the indices of my assimilation it was the fact of my taking up the spade (*mandray angady*) that villagers seized upon as evidence of Betsileoness. On introducing me to people from other villages, Ambohipo people were inclined to boast about how I took up the spade and worked the fields with them, and then, to prove the point, would make me show off my calloused palms. Look, they would say, Betsileo hands.

This is not to vaunt my integration. There were many more difficult, demanding and delicate ways of being like the Betsileo, some of which obviously went unmastered. But what I want to show is how spadework mattered as a Betsileo activity. Looking across the

valley of Sahamadio, the whole landscape was the work of the spade - ricefields and dykes, oxpounds and terraced fields continuing up to the top of each hill. All had been dug and maintained by centuries of digging men. Working in the fields was an activity associated with past performance, but it was geared to future production. The ancestors had levelled off the land so that their descendants might live off it. The spade was the tool that had defined the *tanindrazana*.

With no mechanised methods, much agricultural work was labour-intensive and rather tedious: turning a two-acre field with a spade is slow and tiring; weeding by hand is tough on the back and the eyes. These activities were often enlivened by joking and teasing amongst the workers, but there was one part of the agricultural cycle which was really enjoyable in itself. This was the practice of using oxen to trample the ricefields prior to planting (*hosy*). As mentioned in Chapter Two, preparing the fields was usually done with a harrow in Sahamadio, as it required only two oxen, but it was considered more effective, more fun and more ancestral to assemble a herd of cattle, if they could be borrowed from various kin, and use a group of young men to chase them around a waterlogged field for an hour or so until it was thoroughly churned up, oxygenated and fertilised. Chasing does not really describe the activity properly, and besides, merely chasing would soon have become dull. So all the young men had to drink a bit of rum to inspire courage, and then set about the poor beasts with sticks and kicks and shouts and slaps and singing and swearing, pulling their tails, grabbing their testicles, biting their humps, flicking mud in their eyes and doing anything possible to agitate them to greater heights of churning. The more tired the cattle became, the more they needed coaxing and the braver the agitators became in exciting them to fiercer movement. As the cattle tired you could ride the hump, clinging on to one side as the beast bucked in large, lumbering lurches, staying on as long as possible before jumping clear from the half ton of beef muscle as the huge horned head swung in anger at its tormentor. Everything was monochrome brown: brown mud, brown bodies, brown cows, brown cowshit, brown bodies

covered in brown mud and brown cowshit. Only the whites of eyes and smiles glinted out. This, I was told again and again, is a custom of our ancestors. This is what makes the Betsileo Betsileo.

Of all the agricultural activities I took part in *hosy* was the most self-consciously 'ancestral'. This was partly because drinking rum often made people rather sentimental about the 'ways of the ancestors' (of which drinking rum - as they kept telling me - was itself one). But more significantly, *hosy* was considered ancestral because it had all but died out in the valley, replaced by the rather tedious but labour-saving process of two men marching back and forth with a harrow harnessed to a pair of oxen.

I also think much of the talk of the 'ways of the ancestors' was for my benefit as an anthropologist interested in 'Betsileo ways'. Once people became used to me working in the fields they were less explicit about the ancestors, and taught me the finer points of irrigation and soil-preparation.

It was then that I learned about the techniques of different cultivators, the acquisition of their expertise, and their attitudes to innovation. I noticed how experienced cultivators used a variety of forms of propagation in any one year. Planting young plants in a warm field produced better results than planting older plants in a cold field, but it was more labour intensive. A diverse methodology was one way of responding to the different characteristics of different fields, but it also served as an insurance policy in case one method gave poor returns. Some people were naturally experimental, others more conservative. Those who tried a new technique would test it on a small field first.

I asked Radolphe if it would not offend the ancestors to abandon their techniques of cultivation in favour of modern ones. He replied that new ways were good if they were productive. 'The Betsileo used to live in wooden houses,' he said, 'until they discovered that bricks were better. If something is better, then you should do it.' The ways of the ancestors did not necessarily have to be the ways of their descendants. Just as their blessing brought prosperity (Bloch

1986) to their offspring, so did that prosperity confer honour and remembrance on the ancestors. Slavishly following ancestral ways was to the benefit of neither party.

So there was no single technique of rice cultivation in Sahamadio. I remember one hot afternoon in the dry season standing on one of the large cross-dykes, looking around at the various methods of cultivation in use. Razisy, an elderly lady, was irrigating a field of young rice planted in the old-fashioned scattered way; Ignace and Marcelin were marching up and down the straight lines of Raso'a's young plants with weeding machines; the catechist stood folornly scratching his head over the failure of his 'eight day rice' (a new method) which was growing in patchy clumps in an otherwise empty field. I asked Razisy why she favoured the random scattered pattern over straight lines, which was said to be more productive. She explained that hers was the way of the *ray aman-dreny*, by which she could have meant either the ancestors generally, or her parents in particular. When I asked for clarification she said it was the method her parents had taught her. She added that the line method left too much unused space between the plants, and that when it came to weeding you could not hold a proper conversation with your workmates if you were all strung out in a row. This pragmatic approach was born of a personal history of practical knowledge of rice cultivation that was founded as much on social and moral considerations as on technical ones. By living and working in the ancestral fields the cultivators of Sahamadio were inhabiting a moral landscape that informed these decisions and coloured the judgement of them. This kind of reciprocal relationship between a person and their environment raises our awareness of the ways in which bodily practice informs identity, and how the material world produces moral beings (Bray 1997:41). The technical choices made by the cultivators of Sahamadio were also social and moral ones. Learning to cultivate in the ancestral land necessarily entailed engaging with the moral environment of Sahamadio. The achievements of technology are never simply technical, and technology is never external to culture (Nader

1996). Nor should the environment be treated as a separate realm from the social realm (Geertz 1963). Rather than humans acting on their environment, imposing a cultural pattern on a blank slate, it is more useful in this instance to consider people and the changing environment as part of each other, reciprocally involved in ideas and practices of technology and cosmology (Croll & Parkin 1992). People working in the fields of Sahamadio related to those fields in a very holistic way, composed of an interplay of influences: soil and stories, experiment and continuity, memory and kinship, ancestors and hydraulics. As part of the ecological environment of the *tanindrazana*, they were part of its moral environment, too. This informed their agricultural practice. They formed the landscape and the landscape formed them.

This connection between place and morality is crucial to understanding why people in Ambohipo worried so much about the effect of schooling on their children. Schooling was problematic because it took children away from the *tanindrazana* to different moral environments with non-ancestral values and practices. For this reason, Rasoa was keen that the children she raised should engage with the soil as well as the school. She knew that school was their best chance of a comfortable life and she pushed them in their studies, but she wanted them to receive the practical and moral education acquired through agriculture. When the children arrived home from school there was always work to be done: Bora would fetch the ducks from the ricefields where they had spent the day bathing and feeding, Paosy would collect and chop firewood, Bida would round up the chickens, then together they would pound the rice for the next day. When these jobs were done they were free to do their homework. Rasoa and Rajean-Ba certainly needed their assistance in running the smallholding but they were also keen that their school education should be balanced by an agricultural one. Paosy, a bright boy of thirteen, quite capable of coming top of his class when he put his mind to it, was already destined for the Lycée Sacré Coeur in Fandriana, where he would board through the week and come home at weekends.

Then not only would his labour be lost and the cost of his maintenance rise, but he would lose the chance to acquire the adult agricultural skills of his peers back in Ambohipo. Thus Rajean-Ba spent evenings coaching Paosy to drive an ox cart, teaching him to reverse it, turn it, yoke the oxen despite the fact that he was still quite a small boy.

This agricultural education was valuable training should any of the children not succeed in school. But to Rasoa, it was a social, not just a technical, education. It mattered to her that the children should not grow up to feel themselves 'above' agricultural tasks. Educated people, she noted, did not like to get their hands dirty, which she considered a slight on what was to her the venerable ancestral practice of agriculture. Although a schoolteacher, she came from a peasant family, a prosperous one but with no previous history of education. She was proud of this peasant ancestry. After school she could be found digging barefoot in a manioc field or paddling shin-deep in a rice field catching frogs to feed to her turkeys. This was a source of some amusement to her students, who no doubt expected their French teacher to behave more like Mme Françoise (maths and science), who delegated such tasks to wage labourers and their children. Rasoa wanted Bora, Paosy and Bida to grow up prepared to get their hands dirty, to be able to make a living from it if necessary, and to value the ancestral legacy it represented, even if - especially if - their schooling might take them away from the moral environment of the valley.

Because Sahamadio was an area of great out-migration, there was particular symbolic significance to living in the *tanindrazana*, learning Betsileo *fomba*, and growing rice in the fields made by the ancestors. Lived experience can be a major component of social capital (Bourdieu 1977), and the personal and practical relationship to the moral environment of the land of the ancestors that came with living and working there was a form of social capital unavailable to *ampielezana* living outside the valley. This was never stated explicitly, but a negative criticism of *ampielezana* behaviour implied an affirmation of *tanindrazana* ways, and by extension of the people living there. People living outside the ancestral land, earning and

spending money outside the valley realised they were living unancestral lives. While some severed nearly all connections with the valley, others compensated for their absence through continued contact with their natal village. As we saw in Chapter Three, there was a genuine love amongst town-based *ampielezana* for their natal village, and a desire to maintain links and return there periodically, even though most felt they could no longer live there permanently. Raising money for the school, eating rice from the valley, forming *ampielezana* associations were all ways of demonstrating that desire. Visiting the village was also important. Whenever Solo returned home to visit - perhaps twice a year - he liked to take a spade and join his father out in the fields, although he wore flip-flops because he had become unused to going barefoot. Many *ampielezana* visited Ambohipo during the *lanonana* season. Taking part in tomb rituals served a similar purpose to the cattle sacrifices of Betsimisaraka migrants, for whom the ritual provided a means of re-integrating into the ancestrally conceived and constituted social order (Cole 1999). But such re-integrations were periodic and intermittent, and never full compensation for prolonged absence from the *tanindrazana*.

Houses

Houses built by *ampielezana*, on the other hand, created a permanent presence in the *tanindrazana*, even though the owners might spend years away from the village. The bricks and mortar stood as substitutes for the absentees, and as proof of their intention to return. Even if the houses remained uninhabited, fell into dilapidation, or were nothing more than a pile of well-intentioned bricks marking a plot, they were known as the property of the absentee owner, who thereby maintained a symbolic presence in the village.

For most of the time these houses stood empty, some for years on end. In their emptiness they contrasted with the lived-in houses of permanent residents. As elsewhere in Madagascar (Huntington 1988) building a house was the first duty of a man who wished to take a wife. This represented a severance from the parental home, and the

foundation of a new family. Rather than assuring continuity through succession and replacement of human resources and the retention of fixed and movable property (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995), Betsileo houses were transitory, built anew with each generation, left to crumble when abandoned, and focused on individual families rather than whole descent groups. In this sense they were opposed to tombs, which symbolised continuity, and ricefields, which represented inheritance. As with the Zafimaniry (Bloch 1995), particular Betsileo houses would progressively become associated with the union of the founding couple and the family they raised there. Ideally, as the children grew up, the women would marry out into other houses and villages, and the men would found their own houses, leaving the parental home (*trano lapa*) to be inherited by the youngest son. While the parents were alive, the house would remain the ritual and social focus of the family. Ramama and Radada's house in Antanimangahazo was the *trano lapa* for our family. It was where the children had grown up. It was the first place they visited on return to the village, and the place they sought blessing before leaving it. It was where our extended family met to eat after church on Sunday, where men and their families came to ask for the hand of the daughters of the house, where the brides were given away at the *vody ondry* ceremony. As Carsten and Hugh-Jones argue, in the tradition of Lévi-Strauss, such houses gain their symbolic power not as isolated entities, but through the connections between the house and its inhabitants: 'A house without people is not a proper house' (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995:44).

But the houses of *ampielezana*, on the other hand, were isolated entities, standing deliberately shuttered and empty amongst the inhabited houses of the village. We might say perhaps, that although they were houses, they were not homes. Their symbolic power emanated not from the sum of their internal relations, which were few and infrequent, but from the statement they made about relations with the outside. Architecturally, they resembled town houses transposed to the village. Unlike the houses of permanent

residents, they did not have agricultural space for tools, seeds and livestock downstairs. Nor were they entered via a ladder to the balcony, but had internal staircases. The rooves were usually of tin or pantiles instead of thatch. These were seen as desirable features for anyone who could afford them. When I asked Xavier why *ampielezana* built their own houses in the village instead of staying with their relatives, he said it was because they were used to the comforts of the town. Rajean-Ba put it more bluntly: ‘Why live in the old houses when civilisation has arrived?’

Although these architectural features were generally considered beneficial, others were seen as superfluous. The country seat of the local deputy, Pierre Vazaha, who had worked as ambassador to Germany, was modelled on a Rheinland schloss, complete with towers and turrets looking out over the rice plain. Known locally as the white palace, Pierre Vazaha’s house attracted awe and criticism in equal measures. Some people complained that he was putting himself above others (*manambony tena*) by building something so showy. To a certain extent such critique was undoubtedly inspired by jealousy, but it needs also to be understood in the wider context of Betsileo ideas about the correct presentation of the person, particularly the great value placed on modesty and humility.

The rural Betsileo disliked boasting, and were quietly dismissive of compliments. Moreover, they seemed embarrassed should their own strengths or advantages reveal another’s weaknesses. One of the most complimentary adjectives used of people was *tsotra* - sound, straightforward, unpretentious. It was praiseworthy to be intelligent, honest, and wealthy, but most admirable was the person who nevertheless managed to be *tsotra* at the same time. In fact, the wealthier and more educated a person was, the greater the compliment intended by the adjective *tsotra*.

It was in this light that the big empty houses of *ampielezana* were ambiguous. While it was important to be successful, it was equally important not to appear aloof. While big houses represented

success outside the valley, they were also subject to local moral evaluation. Houses were about individual achievement, but they were also enmeshed in family relations. When I asked the Commandant why *ampielezana* built grand houses and left them empty, he explained: 'Parents expect their departed children to leave something visible in the village. They would be ashamed were they simply to leave and get rich elsewhere. After all, the parents have raised and educated their children: a large house reflects well on them.'

The Commandant's words reveal how the risk of being accused of self-promotion was attenuated by the fact that the visible success of a son conferred honour upon his parents, and by extension his ancestors. A big house in Ambohipo represented an achievement for both the son and his parents. The big houses in the valley were visible proof that the 'land of the ancestors' was producing able and prosperous offspring. So while individual fathers were honoured by the success of their own sons, the valley as a whole could take a certain amount of collective pride in the big houses. At the same time, however, these large modern town houses were a constant visual reminder of the socio-economic differentiation so characteristic of the valley.

So there was an inherent ambiguity about big houses as markers of a person's success. On one hand they stood for the anti-social values of individualism and self-promotion, solid evidence of the uncomfortable truth of social inequality; on the other hand they represented communally approved values, in that they enhanced the honour of the elders, the ancestors, and thus the community in general. In this way, the big houses of *ampielezana* were similar to the tombs they built. Building a tomb was the greatest possible sign of respect for the ancestors, but it was also an act of self-promotion, as we saw in Chapter Five. As with tombs, it was hard to know whether grand houses were symbols of detached individualism or monuments to communal and ancestral prosperity. They were both. *Ampielezana* were treading a fine line between censure and acclaim as they sought, to varying degrees, to fulfil their personal ambitions whilst upholding

community values. Foremost of these values was proof of their continued commitment to, and remembrance of, the *tanindrazana*.

Yet this remembrance was paradoxical. The extravagant architecture of the *ampielezana* was itself becoming a defining mark of the landscape. As we walked down the valley road to Miadanimerina one day, Rasoa, Rakoto and I admired the grand houses. My favourite was a white one beside the road, which had a spiral staircase built into a turret. Rakoto admired, with a nervous chuckle, the senator's house, which featured a double garage. Rasoa said, 'It's like the town here with all these big houses. All the *ampielezana* make it like the town. This is what the northern Betsileo are like.' Thus the educated returnees were redefining the landscape. As the ancestral land made demands on them, so they in turn created it anew, not shaping it with the spade but building it in brick.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the village and the valley formed a moral environment in which certain practical expressions of local knowledge had symbolic resonance as particularly ancestral forms. Living in the land of the ancestors provided residents of Ambohipo with a kind of symbolic capital, which could be opposed to, and offset, the economic capital of *ampielezana*. At the same time, *ampielezana* recognised the moral authority of the *tanindrazana*, and atoned for their absence by substituting their presence with symbols of their continued remembrance of ancestors and kin. These symbols at once confirmed and challenged the values of the ancestral village whilst reforming the ancestral landscape in so doing. Having examined the moral environment of the ancestral land, and the knowledge associated with it, we now turn to the school in order to expose an alternative moral and epistemological environment. This will clarify why parents in Ambohipo worried about the effects of schooling on their children, and will demonstrate the role of knowledge in creating social differentiation.

Chapter Seven

The school and school knowledge

Just as I was approaching Razorza's one-storey mud and thatch house, he came out of the door in a cloud of woodsmoke. Under one arm he held a chicken, which he cast squawking onto a pile of rice straw; under the other he clasped a battered leather satchel. He must have told his pupils I was coming, for they were standing in line against the wall of the schoolroom, and as we approached they sang out in unison: 'Bonjour, tompoko!'. Razorza was the head - the only - teacher at Amboasary VOZAMA school, a mixed-age, mixed-ability, non fee-paying informal school funded by the Catholic Church for children whose parents could not afford to send them to state school. He dug in his satchel for a whistle, and blew softly. The nine children tripped into class, stooping as they passed us, and sat down in rows on the raffia mats. The classroom consisted of four mud walls, a patchy blackboard, a picture alphabet, slates for the pupils, and a pointing stick for the teacher. Razorza began the lesson by pointing to alphabet with his stick as the children together called out the letters. Then he gave them a simple writing task, each child carefully forming letters on its slate according to its ability and then rubbing them out by licking the slate and polishing with a shirt sleeve, apart from one small boy who had brought along as an eraser the padding from a bra. A toddler peeked round the door jamb, and fled on seeing me see him. The open doorway framed a view of the neatly bordered ricefields where harvest was in full swing. Razorza's chicken wandered in, and was shooed away with the stick.

These children, aged between six and nine, were the very poorest of the poor in the district, all from the former slave class, as was everyone in Amboasary including Razorza himself. But it was poverty of knowledge that concerned Razorza: 'They don't have enough skills to take care of their future,' he told me in the break. 'If they are nurtured now, when they are young, then their minds will

blossom and they will do well.’ He was talking about very basic skills: a little reading and some simple arithmetic, not algebra and physics as taught in the state schools. About such learning he had his reservations: ‘The further they proceed in school,’ he said, ‘the more they are influenced by customs from abroad, and the things that make them Malagasy are forgotten.’ Lessons over for the day, the class lined up and bid me farewell: ‘Au revoir, maitresse’ they chanted, intriguingly.

So this was one worry: that schooling, which at one level taught the kind of skills acknowledged to be of great use to Malagasy children, also risked losing them their Malagasy-ness. As one twelve-year-old schoolboy explained with reference to the Antandroy, a largely pastoral ethnic group from the arid south of Madagascar: ‘The reason the Antandroy don’t send their children to school is that they don’t want them to lose their customs.’

It is interesting to note that this worry about the effects of schooling was voiced by both a teacher and a student. Generally, young people saw the opportunities and advantages of education, whether it was the chance to buy pirated Nike trainers or to fly to Europe. They tended to worry less about the ‘loss of customs’ than did the older generation. The young did not have - and were not expected to have - the knowledge of, and interest in, the ancestral Malagasy customs, which were the province of the elders. And the fact that a schoolteacher should have reservations about some of the things learned in school - and Razorza was not the only one - shows the pervasiveness of the northern Betsileo dilemma about education.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine what it was about the school that created this concern, and how it related to the socio-economic differentiation caused by schooling. To do that it is necessary to understand the importance for the northern Betsileo of the relationship between knowledge, morality and place. The previous chapter has demonstrated this with regard to the social knowledge learned by people living in the moral environment of the *tanindrazana*. Now we turn to the school, and the moral dimensions of

the knowledge learned there. I present the school as a place socially and spatially distinct from the village, but nevertheless deeply implicated in the lives of the villagers. A school career for the people of Ambohipo entailed social transition and geographical displacement; it also involved the acquisition of a kind of knowledge considered morally problematic. To grasp in Betsileo terms the spatial and moral orientation of the school and school knowledge is to understand why, despite the opportunities it brought, the school was regarded as having a potentially deleterious effect on children's character. However, I do not consider the school purely from a Betsileo perspective. Schooling and pedagogy in Madagascar, as in other countries, have always been guided by the ideological motivations of the educational establishment and its sponsors. I shall now give a brief historical overview of these various ideological intentions.

The ideological history of the Malagasy school

From the time of their installation in Madagascar, the Protestant missionaries realised that education would be necessary to the evangelical project. There were several related reasons why they chose to supplement their teaching with preaching. Firstly, there was a need for native preachers to spread the word. Secondly, the missionaries wanted the Bible to be read. The Protestant faith had developed in Europe partly as a reaction to the mediaeval Church's narrow control of biblical texts (Marshall 1993:6), and they saw the printed word as the means of liberating and disseminating the Gospel. Thirdly, the teaching of non-religious subjects - maths, grammar, geography - was used as a tool to break down what the missionaries saw as the stony ground of irrational native superstition (Gow 1979:118). Finally, the missionaries considered the moral education of the Malagasy to require closer physical attention than could be achieved merely through preaching. As the Reverend Davidson, an exasperated LMS missionary to the Betsileo, declared: 'The pulpit can exert no influence upon such ignorant people - only the school can do this' (quoted in Raison-Jourde 1991:481). To the missionary mind, attention to

external behaviour could reform the inner being, and this required a European context (Comaroff & Comaroff 1989:270). Systematised schooling provided a circumscribed European environment in which the missionaries could attempt to shape the moral character of the Malagasy by control of their physical comportment.

As we saw in Chapter Two, early missionary schools were used as a means of recruiting forced labour. They provided the ideal site for the registration and control of youth. Each village school was appointed an overseer to enforce attendance and record absence. Much of the time, instead of studying in the classroom, the students were out in the yard being drilled in military manoeuvres, taught to march and use weapons. Controlled ever more closely by the government, schools in the Betsileo region became ‘places of imitation and reproduction of Merina social conduct’ (Raison-Jourde 1991:407). As Christianity became more established in the highlands, as the royal family converted to Protestantism, the Betsileo increasingly associated the Church and its schools with Merina ways, rather than simply *vazaha* ways. This association was still strong when I lived in Ambohipo: the school was an arm of the government, and government was basically a Merina affair.

As the Merina had done before them, the French, in their turn, used the school as a tool of government. Education was a vital component in the economic exploitation and political organisation of the colony: technical rather than moral improvement was the French government’s primary goal. This difference of opinion between colonists and missionaries over the true purpose of native schooling was to lead to political tension between the two parties. As one early Governor is reported to have complained to a Protestant missionary: ‘What we want are natives trained to be a workforce. You, Protestant missionaries, you are making men!’ (quoted in Hatzfeld 1949:27). This kind of ideological tussle can be traced to the long-running split in post-revolutionary France between the roles of Church and state. More particularly, such tension was largely due to the solidly secular nature of the French education system as shaped by the Minister of

Instruction, Jules Ferry. Ferry was fiercely secular in his policies: in 1882 he passed a bill in France which banned religious and clerical supervision from all state primary schools; he also attempted to hound the Jesuits out of their teaching roles with a law forbidding members of ‘unauthorised congregations’ from teaching in any educational establishment whatsoever (Bury 1985:158). He has a big lycée named after him in Antananarivo, a testament to his impact on colonial education policy.

Ferry’s Republican educational ideology was implemented with vigour by the first two French governors of Madagascar. The teaching missions, who had previously been fighting each other for educational dominance, suddenly found they faced a powerful common enemy wielding a large secular stick. Seeking to undermine British influence by targeting the Protestant missions, the first governor, Gallieni, passed a law imposing a French curriculum and making French the language of instruction. Gallieni’s successor, Augagneur, a fervent freemason who was passionately anti-clerical, was opposed to Protestants and Catholics in equally large measures. His assiduous legislation favouring lay schools resulted in the closure of numerous teaching missions (Gow 1979:231).

The government’s aim was to school the Malagasy into allegiance to the French state. An educational edict passed in 1908 stated as its objective: ‘To develop in the younger generation feelings of fidelity towards France, and to initiate them in our ideas and customs’ (quoted in Hugon 1975:86). France was portrayed to schoolchildren as the benevolent mother, as in this song, remembered by adults in Ambohipo:

<i>Frantsa malala mpamely soa</i>	Beloved France, sower of goodness
<i>Reny mpitaiza, mamelona koa</i>	Nurturing mother, and giver of life
<i>Ireto ny zanaka tiana tokoa</i>	Here we are your beloved children
<i>Miara-manaiky sy miara-manoa</i>	Accepting and obeying together

This song (note the agricultural metaphor) was sung by schoolchildren in Sahamadio to the District Commissioner each 14th July. The fact

that he almost certainly did not understand the words is irrelevant - the song's message was aimed at the children. Rasoa, however, who had sung it as a child, told me, 'We sang it with our mouths but not with our hearts.' She did enjoy the accompanying dance, though - a typically Betsileo clapping, swaying and shuffling back-and-forth affair. Throughout the colonial era the curriculum taught in Malagasy schools was that of the metropole. Students learned the geography of the Hexagon rather than that of the Great Red Island. The history taught was the history of France and Europe. One middle-aged parent in Ambohipo recalled to me with an ironic smile a history lesson from his childhood entitled, 'Nos ancêtres les gaulois.' Actually, the existence of the lesson is almost certainly apocryphal, but it has come to represent for the French, and for educated Malagasy, the Francocentric bias of the colonial curriculum.

An edict passed in 1916 stated that the aim of primary education was to instil good habits into children, make them well-behaved, and help them reach their 'productive potential' (Hugon 1975:86). The colonial development of Madagascar relied upon the creation of a compliant workforce. Clearly, most of the work involved in the installation of a modern infrastructure could be achieved using unskilled workers, and much of the island's road and rail network was constructed using the forced labour of untrained Malagasy peasants. But there is more to a state than roads and railways, especially for a nation as enamoured of bureaucracy as the French. The government needed an assimilated Malagasy elite with knowledge of French language and culture to serve as intermediaries between the government and the people. This subaltern cadre needed to submit ideologically and politically to French power (Hugon 1974:507; 1975:84). The colonial classroom sought the technical, ideological and behavioural formation of the Malagasy in preparation for the minor role some would assume in the government of the French empire.

At a local level, government was organised through a form of indirect rule known as the *politique des races*. This policy gave responsibility for parochial affairs of state to local native

administrators, who obviously required a basic level of education to fulfil their functions. This was Gallieni's way of reducing the power of the Merina in the regions. Other minor roles in government could also be filled by natives with a basic education: a primary school certificate could turn a peasant into a postman or a carter into a clerk. This strategy was not a purely operational procedure: Governor Gallieni saw it as part of his ideological mission to improve the knowledge of the lower echelons of society, a policy which brought him into conflict with plantation owners and other colonists who did not want the natives getting ideas above their station (Hatzfeld 1949:3).

To appease these settlers, the Malagasy were denied educational parity with French citizens. They were given enough schooling to become useful bureaucrats, but not so much that they might pose an intellectual challenge to their rulers. Balancing the need for a bureaucratic state with the political consequences of 'too much schooling' was one of the many tensions of empire facing colonial governors (Stoler & Cooper 1997:7). It was not until the 1940s, as part of the politics of appeasement following the 1947 revolt, that France opened up the colony's lycées to the Malagasy population. Those students from Sahamadio who were successful at school under the colonial regime, and who aimed for jobs in the administration, were involved in a process which inevitably drew them away from the Betsileo world of the ricefield and village into the French world of the school and the town. As the colonial age drew to a close, the best students from Sahamadio were chosen to go to Ambositra (the district capital) to study at the 'collège des blancs'. At this level, the school was a place of privilege and social advancement (Hugon 1974:507). The French promoted schooling as a way of sharing their lifestyle, since, as the successful pupils would become civil servants and administrators, they would eventually replace them in their administrative capacity upon Madagascar's gaining independence. This, of course, was the central irony of the transition to independence in many African colonies: the people that effected decolonisation and

took control of the newly-independent nation were those most initiated in the culture of their former colonisers.

Access to schooling, having been restricted by the French, expanded under successive post-independence regimes. Education was seen as a right of the people, and a duty of the government, signalling commitment to western purposes and opportunity (Fuller 1991). Open access to schooling encouraged the ideology of individual achievement based upon personal merit (Hugon 1975:92), an idea related to the wider achievement of national autonomy and self-determination for Madagascar. This is clearly reflected in the curriculum document issued to all state teachers. It propounds both the general and the specific aims of state education. The general aims are rather ambitious and high-flown, and they capture the ideological connection made through the school between the individual and the nation:

Education..... must above all aim at the formation of an autonomous and responsible individual, imbued with the cultural and spiritual values of his country.....as well as with democratic values. [.....] Trained in the freedom of choice, the future citizen will be led to share in the cultural life of the community, in scientific progress and the benefits which stem from it, to promote and protect the national cultural heritage, to attain literary and artistic achievements and to be able to contribute to the economic and social development of Madagascar. (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale: *Programmes scolaires à partir de l'année scolaire 1996-1997*. pp 5-6, my translation.)

Under the Second Republic, the policy of *fanagasiana* (malgachisation) replaced French with Malagasy as the official language of government and education. The new school curriculum abandoned the Francocentric lessons of the colonial era, and promoted in their place a pan-Malagasy cultural identity. Instead of learning about 'nos ancêtres les gaulois', pupils studied the ancestral customs of their own island and the 18 ethnic groups which constitute the

Malagasy people, although this classification was itself the legacy of colonial ethnology. The disadvantage of this nationalist pedagogy was that it left Madagascar technically and linguistically isolated, and the skills of its schoolchildren redundant in the global market. Moreover, while the *fanagasiana* changed the content of the curriculum it did not change the form. The style of pedagogy found in post-independence classrooms, and the discipline and regulation of students replicated the colonial model. This legacy was still apparent in Ambohipo's schools during my fieldwork, as I discuss later in this chapter.

Theoretical perspectives on schooling

The pedagogy I observed in the classrooms of Ambohipo was the product of a tangled history, the making of more than a century of articulation between the educational intentions of the villagers and those of the missionaries, the colonial government and the post-independence regimes. The brief outline given above of some of the ideological motivations of these educational providers does not do justice to the complexity of that articulation, but it provides a necessary point of engagement with my analysis of schooling in Ambohipo. In the sociology of education, it is the ideological content of schooling that has attracted most theoretical analysis, as schools have been identified as places of inculcation by means of pedagogies both explicit and implicit. In the celebrated formulation of Althusser, schools form the 'ideological state apparatus' by which students are compelled to maintain the current system of status relations and power. Rather than educating students into positions of equal opportunity, schools reproduce the structural inequalities upon which the capitalist economy and state depend, by positioning them firmly in the current hierarchy of class relations (Althusser 1971). The status quo is maintained as students accept the version of the world peddled by their rulers (Gramsci 1971). This raises the question, however, as to whether the state and its ideologies are as internally consistent as these theorists assume, and whether the messages are transferred undiluted and unadulterated through the state apparatus.

The work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) has lent a degree of sophistication to this theory of reproduction by elaborating the concept of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence is the means by which schools impose a meaning system on the students, which validates particular forms of symbolic capital. The school teaches certain ways of acting and understanding that privilege the taste and intellect of the dominant class. Bourdieu and Passeron show how French schools recognise and reward certain skills, tastes and deportments. These are put to advantageous economic ends in the wider world through the class contacts they create. Because the school presents itself as apolitical, subordinate groups accept without question the claims made by the dominant classes for their own cultural superiority. Thus the non-elite develop a sense of their own social limits, becoming victims of the symbolic violence which subordinates them without resorting to physical coercion (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977).

Both the above approaches are useful ways of thinking about the wider political, social and economic goals of academic institutions. But they are problematic in that they assume a consistent and monolithic dominant ideology which students and parents unconsciously and passively accept. In Ambohipo I found that the undeniable power of the school to define meaning was mitigated by the conscious engagement of villagers with its values. However, I show that adults and children engaged with the school at different levels and in different ways. Parents and teachers identified for themselves the ideological context of schooling, being both critical of it and selectively compliant with it. Admittedly, students were less critical and less political, but an undeveloped critical and political awareness does not make them blank slates for pedagogic inculcation. In this chapter I am concerned with how the Betsileo interpreted the school's ideology in their own terms, not on how that ideology might have been intended by the state.

Shifting the emphasis from ideology to control, the work of Foucault (1977) shows how students become subjects of domination through the school. In the classroom, the external forces of state

control become internalised through the ‘political economy of the body’ (Foucault 1977:25). Systems of surveillance and regulated behaviour promote obedience to the normalising regimes of the establishment, so that students learn to discipline themselves. Rather than bearing down from above, domination becomes diffused into the relationships enacted between its very subjects. As Mitchell (1988) shows with reference to educational provision in colonial Egypt, regulation, supervision, inspection and instruction were all means by which the school sought to inculcate into its students particular habits of self discipline or ‘implicit obedience’ (1988:69). Foucault’s focus on the regimented behaviour of social actors helps us understand how ideological control can become embodied in school practice and how the education of the body is as important an object of study as the education of the intellect. The nineteenth-century missionaries to Africa, for whom the ordering of the body was an external manifestation of the ordering of the soul, used the school as a site for regulating and ‘civilising’ the behaviour of the natives. If the native rejected the message, the missionaries believed, s/he might still be transformed by its medium (Comaroff & Comaroff 1989:290). Similarly, the colonial government instituted forms of disciplined behaviour, such as saluting the *tricolore*, which aimed to embody allegiance and submission to the French nation. The post-independence residue of such forms is discussed below as I describe elements of school practice in Ambohipo.

The dominance of these embodied relations of power is not, however, total. It is contested by various ‘mobile and transitory points of resistance’ (Foucault 1978:96). These have provided fertile ground for anthropologists, who, keen to demonstrate the agency of peripheral and subaltern peoples, have identified the importance of practices of ‘everyday resistance’ (Scott 1985) as a challenge to the notion that power or ideology are unidirectional, comprehensively dominating forces. This approach has been usefully applied to the ethnography of education, notably by Willis (1981). Through careful ethnographic description of how a rebellious group of ‘lads’ rejects the values of

their English state school and create their own interpretation of its messages, Willis gives agency to the supposed subjects of ideological inculcation. The irony, however, is that for all their creative resistance, the 'lads' are actually complicit in their own false consciousness, and end up as working class kids with dead-end working class jobs.

Ambohipo's schoolchildren were nothing like Willis' 'lads'. They were quiet, respectful and compliant with the rules of the school. I found that students, teachers, and parents - although in different ways and at different levels of reflection - were accepting of the school's behavioural regimes and ideological codes, but only within a delimited social space - that of the classroom itself.

School in Ambohipo, although it was staffed by village teachers and attended by village children, stuck me as a social sphere separate from the village. It had its own space, its own codes, its own ways, of which I provide examples below. Although I noted these differences, nobody ever commented on them. This is partly because they took them for granted. Nevertheless, adults and children were aware - though the latter to a lesser extent - of how the school implicated and introduced its products into wider economic and social networks alien to the moral environment of the *tanindrazana*. They complied with the school's codes and practices not simply for the material advantage that could accrue from success in education, but because they expected of Betsileo youth that they should gain experience of alternative social, moral and technical environments. For this reason I find it useful to treat Ambohipo schools as sites of cultural production (Levinson, Foley & Holland 1996), productive of educated people and of local interpretations of the meaning of education. A description of school and school practice, and of the attitudes and values that people in Ambohipo attributed to the school and its products, is crucial in order to understand the role of the school and school knowledge in producing different kinds of people, and thus in creating social differentiation in the village. In this chapter I show how the school was a locus of foreign knowledge, both social and technical. I demonstrate some of the behavioural and pedagogical

legacies of the French colonial system, and show how they differed from village practice outside the school. I show how the technical knowledge acquired in school bore little practical application to village life, but was liable to be perceived as foreign and morally problematic. I give the historical and social background to this perception. And I demonstrate why elders worried that education would lead to the abandonment of the ancestral ways. The social construction of school knowledge as alien and morally questionable contrasts with the moral value placed on living in the *tanindrazana*. The fact that the trajectory of schooling took children away from the moral environment of the *tanindrazana* for extended periods also made it problematic. These reservations were offset by the fact that schooling was both a useful and a necessary alternative to rural poverty, as well as the primary source of wealth. This chapter examines in depth the relationship between knowledge, place, morality and prosperity as a means of explaining the ambivalent relationship of the northern Betsileo to their schools.

At school

Ambohipo primary school - formerly the Lutheran mission school - was built in the late nineteenth century on land donated by Rasalamonina far out to the south west of the village. Together with the Lutheran church and parsonage, the school formed a cluster of buildings estranged from the village centre, surrounded by uncultivated pasture. The allocation of land at the periphery of Ambohipo was probably a strategy to keep the new religion at arm's length from the centre of the village and the main tomb. It was part of the politics of space of the missionary encounter (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:204). When it was built, this small peripheral group of buildings must have appeared strikingly modern: they were the first brick buildings in the village, probably in the valley; they housed a *vazaha*, and later his family; they were the centre of European religion, European lifestyle and European learning.

By the time I came to live in Ambohipo the village had approached slightly, and the school had been appropriated by the state. But the learning environment was still basic. The school consisted of six brick classrooms built in an L-shape around a mud yard. Light entered the classrooms through the large unglazed windows, out of which distracted children could see, smell and hear the passage of life outside: the herding of cows, the working of fields, the chopping of wood. When it rained, the shutters would have to be closed, leaving the class in darkness, deafened by the clatter of the tin roof. For this reason, lessons in the rainy season were often a race against the imminent arrival of early afternoon downpours.

The secondary school - which was more modern, though just as basic - stood in even greater isolation, half a mile up on a scrubby hillside overlooking the valley. In the weekdays the classrooms resounded with the chorus of rote learning, and the playground swelled with the indeterminate cacophony of breaktime. In the evenings and at weekends the place was deserted, noiseless but for the sound of the hillside wind nagging at a loose flap of iron roofing.

The school and the wider world

Each stage of schooling took the pupils further from the village. The primary school was at the edge of the village; the secondary school was alone on the hill; lycée was in Fandriana; university was in Antananarivo or perhaps even France. Schooling entailed a slow progression away from Ambohipo and into the world of the Merina and the French. Those who entered that world necessarily learned its ways, and were said to become more like the Merina or the *vazaha*. These two groups provided the counterpoint against which the northern Betsileo measured their own character. People in Ambohipo were fond of comparing Betsileo and Merina characteristics, always to the advantage of the former. Betsileo were said to be straightforward (*tsotra*), even simple (*vendrana*) whereas Merina were cunning (*fetsy*) and haughty (*miavonavona*). This archetype was due to the fact that the Merina were most often encountered - and had been so historically

(see Chapter Two) - in their capacity as either administrators or traders. The fact that they had colonised Fisakana still survived in local social memory; there were ancestral taboos against marrying Merina dating from this time, and tales of the ancestors' revenge against those who transgressed.

For most of the colonial period, education above secondary level was reserved for the children of French colonists. Naturally, then, when it became available to the Malagasy, they associated it with the privileged world of the *vazaha*. In Ambohipo, people who had studied hard and acquired the wealth and lifestyle of Europeans were said to have 'crossed over' (*tafitra*) - a metaphor that reflects the spatial displacement involved in a school career. This is related to wider Malagasy notions about the geographical isolation of Madagascar and its separation from the rest of the world, referred to as 'the other side' (*an-dafy*). In Betsileo perception the school, its ways and its knowledge all originated from this 'other side'. Pupils and teachers who took the short walk to the outskirts of the village every morning were stepping into a social space with different hierarchies, a different language, different kinds of knowledge, and different codes of behaviour.

'The customs of the school'

Every morning at eight o'clock school started with the head teacher blowing loudly on a whistle. The children, scattered round the playground in gaggles and gangs, would rush to stand before their classrooms, lining up in order of height. A chosen pupil would then step forward to hoist a faded Malagasy flag up a kinked and wobbly staff of eucalyptus. Then the pupil, standing before the ranks of children, would shout out an order: 'Stand straight! Arms out! Stamp feet!' The rank and file executed these commands with a commendable approximation of unison, and then a final order sent them in filing into their classrooms. I found this little routine fascinating, so different from any other activity I had observed in the village. The children did not understand my interest in the drill, for

they accepted it as a matter of course. When I asked a group of boys why they did the drill and what it meant, they seemed rather bemused by the question. 'It's just the custom of the school,' replied that morning's flag-raiser, echoing a phrase used by Foucault (1977:176) to describe the disciplinary regimes of educational institutions. The teachers also had a casual attitude to the drill, standing around chatting as it was played out before them without any direction or intervention of their own. It seemed a perfect example of Foucaultian power, existing so naturally in the structure of the institution that its presence went unquestioned by the people who reproduced it. The students would not have performed the drill without the monitoring presence of their teachers. It was an activity peculiar to the authority structure of the school, and both students and teachers accepted it as such.

The authority of teachers was marked in the classroom by the manner in which they addressed the students. On my first day in class, I was struck by the abruptness of the teachers' directives: 'Open your books! Stop writing! Bring me your work!' Like much of the content of the lessons, these commands were issued in French. Unlike much of the content of the lessons, they were easily understood. In Ambohipo I learned that a direct order, except perhaps to a recalcitrant child, was considered embarrassing and indecorous, and was usually circumvented by a long-winded and apologetic request. In a lucid exposition of Malagasy speech forms, Keenan (1989) demonstrates the linguistic subtlety required to dissipate the abruptness implied by the use of imperatives. Directness in speech is associated with the ways of children and things contrary to tradition (Keenan 1989:131), which is why French is the language of choice for commands in Madagascar, particularly in the un-Malagasy setting of the school. Indeed in literary Malagasy French is known as 'the language of command' (*ny teny baiko*); this is due to the association of relations of command with the French military conquest and colonial rule in general (Graeber 1996:74,75). The same relations of authority exist between the Malagasy peasant and his livestock, which is why Malagasy cows speak French (Bloch 1998b). Orders given to Ambohipo

schoolchildren were given in French because that was the language suited to command, and the classroom was the environment for command. In houses in the village I rarely heard the imperative mode used in Malagasy, and never in French. When it was, it was usually used by women to children, but not with the force of classroom usage. As Keenan (1989) shows, women tend to speak more directly than men; I found this generally true of all Ambohipo women, but particularly of women schoolteachers.

Similarly, the way in which teachers corrected their students' errors in class was at odds with normal village practice. One teacher, when confronted with a class of small outstretched hands straining to answer her question, would dismiss each incorrect suggestion with a robust and definitive 'Faux!'. Just as people in Ambohipo were otherwise disinclined to give orders, they were also reluctant to contradict. The usual polite way of disagreeing with one's interlocutor was the gentle formula: 'Yes, that could be true.' I learned to differentiate this from the formula for agreement, which was: 'Yes, that really is true.' People were more direct in contradicting children than adults, but the manner was still gentle and explanatory. In the classroom, however, direct contradiction was part of the teacher's role, and it was rarely qualified by an explanation of why an answer was wrong. The children seemed unperturbed by the apparent put-downs, and continued to proffer answers to the teacher's questions. This was partly because, as children, they were more used to contradiction (though of a gentler kind), and their speech patterns - at least amongst themselves - were more confrontational than those of adults. Nevertheless, the communicative register of the school was quite different from that of the village.

In Chapter Four I discussed the Betsileo reluctance to talk about inequalities in social and economic status and achievement. In a social environment scored through with demarcations of differentiation, it was remarkable that these differences were seldom alluded to. Moreover, self-promotion was frowned upon. Generally, in rural highland Madagascar, the more influential a person is, the less

they manifest it (Graeber 1996:74); speech-makers at important occasions make great show of their unworthiness to perform a task they are actually very good at, and constantly claim inadequacy and inferiority (Keenan 1989). A common criticism of *ampielezana* in Ambohipo was that they put themselves above others (*manambony tena*). The comparison of relative merits was usually avoided. In the classroom, though, achievement was constantly measured and compared, for it is inherent in the nature of schools that students should be ranked according to ability. Ranking was particularly prevalent at the end of term, when exam results were announced in the playground to the assembled school and any parents free to attend. On one occasion I attended in *loco parentis* to hear Bida's results. The children were lined up as every morning in order of height before their classrooms - the smallest at the front, the tallest at the back. After the drill, the head teacher gave a speech welcoming everybody and stressing the importance of pupils obtaining the pass mark (*moyenne*), which was the indicator as to whether they would go up a class at the end of the school year. Then the teacher for the youngest class held the form's exercise books, in which they had written their exams, and called the pupils to her in descending order of exam success. The top pupil came forward with her head bowed, blushing at the applause, and then went and stood near her teacher where she formed the head of a new line. This went on until all those pupils who had scored the *moyenne* had been called out and were now forming an order of merit. The teacher told the remainders that they would have to make a big effort if they were to change class in June. She then called them out one-by-one in descending order. No applause. Sometimes she gave a comment about a pupil's attitude or ability: 'This one was ill for much of the term.' 'This one's always mucking about in class.' 'This one seems to have been away most of the time scaring sparrows off his father's rice seedlings.' The last little boy, standing solemnly as he waited to be called out, cast a glance over his shoulder to see if anybody was still with him. Nobody was. He took his book and joined the others.

The language of instruction

School rewards those pupils who satisfy and renew its credentials (Illich 1970). That is to say, school teaches students to be good at schooling, and exams test for proficiency at doing exams. This was certainly true of schooling in Ambohipo. The key to exam success was the ability to memorise rather abstract strands of French - for this formed the greater part of the curriculum and exam format.

In one geography lesson the seven year-old pupils were taught about oceans. With no preamble, the teacher had the class repeat several times the phrase: 'Un océan est une vaste étendue d'eau salée'. When they had mastered this, she asked: 'Qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un océan?', to which those with the best memories for language replied: 'Un océan est une vaste étendue d'eau salée'. Soon all the pupils were able to repeat the formula, but it was clear that they were not sure what they were saying. They knew how to answer a 'Qu'est-ce que c'est que...?' question, and they could do it without necessarily understanding the content. So the teacher translated the statement into Malagasy.

Although none of them had ever seen a stretch of water larger than a ricefield, let alone a salty one, the translation seemed to enlighten them, and they went back to repeating the formula in French, before receiving instruction in the measurement of the elevation of mountain ranges - in French.

The use of French as the language of instruction in Malagasy schools dates from the colonial period, when all subjects were taught in that language and Malagasy itself was not even part of the curriculum. After independence all teaching continued in French but Malagasy was added to the curriculum, although the grammar was still explained in French! The political nationalism of the Second Republic extended into the classroom, and made Malagasy the new language of instruction. This programme of *fanagasiana* was problematic in that some of the subjects were by nature particularly resistant to explanation in Malagasy. Moreover, as the Director of Milamaina secondary school, Ravoson Xavier, explained to me, the problem was compounded by the fact that university teaching continued to be held

in French, so students who had been taught in Malagasy at school were disadvantaged when confronted by a French-based learning environment. The fervent ideology of the early experiments at *fanagasiana* was eventually tempered by considerations of practical pedagogy. In schools in Ambohipo both languages were used. Sometimes a lesson taught entirely in French would be summarised in Malagasy to ensure comprehension, but the homework would entail memorising French sentences in preparation for a test the next day. Those students with the greatest aptitude for memorising strands of French, such as the definition of an ocean, were usually the most successful at school.

Teachers spent much time considering language use. I discussed this one day with the primary school teachers as we passed the break on the grass in the shade of the eucalyptus grove by the playground, as the girls skipped and the boys played football. One teacher claimed that English was easier to learn than French, had greater global currency and ought to be given greater prominence in the syllabus. Malagasy, on the other hand, was spoken by nobody else in the world and was long-winded and cumbersome. Despite my gentle assertion that Malagasy's prolixity was integral to its elegance, Ramose Antoine insisted that it was in fact the enemy of progress. The head teacher agreed. Before the break she had coaxed her class through a complex problem of mathematics and geometry involving a triangular field, apple trees, baskets of apples, cost of transportation to market and subsequent profit margins. All had been carried out in French, to the puzzlement of the children, who had succeeded only in measuring the field. I suggested that the pupils might have found the problem easier had it been set in Malagasy, but the head teacher protested that the Malagasy language could not cope with expressing the mathematical terms, being unwieldy, long and complicating. Besides, the pupils would have to do mathematics in French when they went up to the secondary school, so it was better to start now.

So the classroom situation entailed a cohabitation of codes: Malagasy was used to make things clear, and French to make them

official. A similar situation is described by Siegel (1986) in schools in Java, where the teacher presents the lessons in high Indonesian - the official language of the state and the school - but the students solve the problems in their own vernacular, low Javanese. When they have worked out an answer they present it to the teacher in high Indonesian. The fact that school knowledge is presented in this official, non-local language gives it an air of mystery and opacity; it is not of the world that pertains between the students themselves (Siegel 1986:144-46). The same was true of the facts learned in the classrooms of Ambohipo. Most of the subject-matter bore very little relation to the students' everyday rural existence: measuring mountains and triangular orchards, giving imaginary guided tours of the pyramids, or talking about sexual reproduction were not regular Betsileo activities. This is why they were presented to the children in a style (commanding and contradictory) and a language (French) so different from the communicative norms of village life.

School knowledge

I do not think that everything taught at school was necessarily expected by teachers or pupils to be applicable or useful in itself. As in any school, there was little practical use for much of what was taught, but the process was a means to an end. For young people the school was a representative of, and a gateway to, the world outside the valley. When I asked a class of 15-year-olds for what purpose they used their school knowledge in the village, they could only think of one: doing their homework!

There was little opportunity to use school-acquired knowledge in the village. For example, although most people in Ambohipo were literate, there were few occasions on which anybody did any reading or writing. There were no newspapers, no advertisements and almost no bought goods with packaging. Nobody except myself read for pleasure - partly because there was no material in Malagasy for that purpose. Short of reading-matter one day I was pleased to find a French copy of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Unfortunately it was only

Volume II - so I returned it to its function as a doorstep. Some families possessed a copy of *Fihirana Vaovao*, the Catholic hymnal. I was the only person ever to use it in church, as everybody else knew all the words to all the hymns and had done since childhood. Affairs of state usually required literacy skills and occasionally knowledge of French. Villagers not able to deal with a government form usually took it to someone who was, such as the mayor or a schoolteacher. The *fiche de recensement fiscal* (taxation form) that the president of the *fokontany* brought round to each house was, curiously, largely in French. Indeed, it demanded a greater knowledge of French than could be acquired at school, employing as it did complicated terminology for land categories (e.g. unexploitable tracts) and ungrowable crops (cauliflower). If the tax returns filed were not completely accurate then this was perhaps because the form was misunderstood.

I found that the knowledge learned at school was not necessarily expected to be operable at all. For example, the French language seemed to be taught less for its communicative value, than as an exercise in studying grammar. In one lesson I noted that students were proficient at identifying different types of sentence (interrogative, negative, interro-negative, declarative etc), but hardly able to produce examples of their own. This was in part because the children were studying for an examination with no oral component. But it was also due to the fact that learning in Ambohipo's schools did not necessarily entail understanding. When I asked Bida, a 9-year-old who had been learning French for four years, if he could speak the language, he replied, 'No, of course not. I'm only learning.'

The provenance and authority of school knowledge

To understand Bida's rather perplexing statement we need to understand the local meanings given to the concept of learning. The verb 'to learn' in Malagasy is *mianatra*, which (as in Mandarin) also means 'to copy'. Much learning in Ambohipo schools simply involved the copying of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, formulae, equations, diagrams and graphs from the blackboard into exercise

books. The children took these home to be memorised for a test the next day. The knowledge learned at school was doubly decontextualised. Not only did it have almost no application to the village, but its presentation in the form of the written word, which thereafter served as the basis for memorisation, took it a further remove from its original context.

Because it was taught in a setting with different codes to the village, neither teachers nor students expected school knowledge to be in context. That is why Bida never really expected to be able to speak French. One day at the secondary school I asked a class of teenagers where the knowledge that they acquired in school originated. They answered that it came from the teacher. She told me it came from the Ministry [of Education], and that the Ministry got it from abroad, probably from France. It is interesting to note that the class did not think beyond their teacher as the source of knowledge, and seemed to trust implicitly in her pedagogic authority. In turn, the teacher taught whatever the Ministry ordered her to teach. School knowledge was not knowledge to be debated, but to be accepted on authority from elsewhere.

The provenance of school knowledge was integral to the manner in which it was delivered. School knowledge was copied; it was rarely discussed or debated. As relayers of undebatable knowledge from an authoritative beyond, the teachers marked their place in the chain of authority by means of behaviour fitting to its origins. The depersonalised commands and brusque correction described earlier in this chapter were the fitting way to deliver such inalienable French facts. In daily village life, as opposed to the classroom, teachers did not act in this way. Although they were respected outside school for their learning, they did not bring with them the presentational style of the classroom. It was as if they switched into a special mode in class, acting out the behaviours and rules expected of schoolteachers; in complying with that pedagogical style the students also demonstrated active adherence to the ways of the school and the classroom community (Fuller 1991:108).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977:108) argue that the ‘status authority’ of the teacher, based as it is on the pedagogical conventions of the institution, rules out the need for effective communication: the message is given authority not by the clarity of its content, but by the status relations of its context. This insight helps explain the pervasive use of French in Ambohipo schools. Given the authority of the teacher as relayer of uncontested information, the message did not need to be understood, merely accepted and memorised.

As authoritative and authorised knowledge, school knowledge was not questioned or debated by teachers or students. It was related (rather than communicated) by the former, and accepted (rather than understood) by the latter. Bloch (1993) argues that for the Zafimaniry, the authoritative and undebatable character of school knowledge makes it of a kind with ancestral knowledge, which also originates from a realm beyond everyday lived human experience. Hailing from an authoritative beyond it is not expected to be fully accessible or understandable to normal living mortals. I think the northern Betsileo related to school knowledge in the same way, but they opposed it to the kind of ancestral knowledge described in the previous chapter, that is to say the practical moral knowledge of *fomba* acquired through living in the *tanindrazana*. The difference between the Zafimaniry and the Betsileo in this regard is due to their radically different levels of contact with formal schooling. Isolated deep in the forest, the Zafimaniry have had little engagement with the trappings of the national government and its institutions; schools did not arrive in the area until after independence. In Fisakana, however, school knowledge took the Betsileo youth away into the world of the *vazaha* throughout the colonial period, and continued to do so after independence. The associations of school knowledge with the experience of colonialism meant that it could not be equated with ancestral knowledge. In fact school knowledge was opposed to the practical ancestral morality learned in the moral environment of the land of the ancestors. It was the crucial association of school knowledge not just with place, but

with displacement that gave it its particular social construction in Ambohipo.

Fahaizana

This authoritative but socially implicated school knowledge was referred to by the Malagasy word '*fahaizana*'. As mentioned in Chapter Six, the term could be applied to a range of technical skills and abilities, but it was most commonly associated with the academic and technical knowledge of Europeans and formal schooling. Correspondingly, *fahaizana* was something the Betsileo themselves said they did not have, and considered they could only acquire through the school, as the following examples show.

One Saturday morning striding off to market to buy seed potatoes with Rajean-Ba and Rakoto, I found myself giving an account of the anti-Poll Tax riots in London in the early 1990s. Rajean-Ba, whose grown-up son was a gendarme, was intrigued by the use of mounted police as a means of crowd control. Even more fascinating to him was my description of how some protesters countered the charging horses and swinging truncheons by rolling quantities of marbles under the horses' hooves. 'Ah,' he said, 'you Europeans really have *fahaizana*.'

In my time in Ambohipo I heard so many similar statements that I dedicated a special category in my card index to 'Examples of Europeans having *fahaizana*'. Most of the entries made a far more obvious connection: Europeans invented aeroplanes; Europeans had been to the moon ('Was this true? Was this really true? Ah, what *fahaizana*!'); even the small metal biro which I used for taking notes was singled out as evidence of superior western technical achievement. But to say that rioting Europeans had *fahaizana* because they knew to roll marbles under the hooves of charging police horses seemed to me to be stretching a point: it suggested the correlation between Europeans and *fahaizana* ran very deep indeed.

This was brought home to me one day at the village brick and tile workshop. Walking past one day I called a greeting to the two

workers and they invited me to come in. (It was common courtesy in Ambohipo to invite passers-by inside, but such invitations were rarely taken up - except by curious anthropologists). I started asking the men about their methods of brick-making, and they seemed genuinely surprised that I did not know how it was done. When I took out my notebook they thought I was being funny and fell about laughing. 'How come you don't know about this?' they asked, 'surely you make bricks in England. The Europeans invented bricks.' I had never visited a brick works in my life before; it was not something I had ever really thought about. I was just taking notes because that's what anthropologists are supposed to do. They were teasing me so I teased them back: 'I'm writing this down so I can take this method back to England and amaze people there with the *fahaizana* of the Betsileo of Ambohipo.'

'Then we'll all be rich,' they laughed, enjoying the irony of the situation. The reason the irony worked for them - and the Betsileo I knew appreciated irony and were very good at laughing at themselves - was that they never considered the Malagasy to have any *fahaizana* of their own at all. This was not just typical Betsileo modesty and self-effacement. They really meant it. When I asked the brickmakers to give me some examples of Malagasy *fahaizana*, they were stuck.

'I don't know,' faltered Hary. 'You get *fahaizana* through training and education.' I prompted him a little, suggesting the possibility of ancestral skills. He said that marquetry, weaving and rice-transplanting were ancestral *fahaizana*. But his initial reaction was typical of most people to whom I put the same question: *fahaizana* was something that Europeans had, and that the Malagasy could get only through the school.

On one of my visits to the secondary school I took a class of 16-year-olds for their Civic Education lesson. I used the opportunity to ask them why they thought it was important to study. They gave various reasons, both idealist and practical: 'So as to have knowledge, which enriches life'; 'In order to get a job because of the shortage of

land'; 'So as to be able to find one's way around when going to Europe'; 'So as not to be cheated by people'.

This last reason was strikingly common. It formed part of a frequently expressed set of notions about cunning and gullibility. These ideas were often elaborated in the popular stories about the Malagasy folk-hero Ikotofetsy and his friend Imahaka, two young tricksters who make good sport and a good living by duping credulous peasants. The Betsileo were aware that other Malagasy were fond of depicting them as up-country simpletons, a stereotype from which education could liberate them. Jokes about the simplicity and gullibility of the Betsileo were common. A typical example involves a Betsileo peasant on his first visit to Antananarivo eating an ice-cream and then returning the cornet to the vendor, mistaking it for a cup. The following dictation given to a class of six year-olds at Ambohipo primary school stresses the importance of not being cheated: *We study. Everybody must study. Be they big or small. So why must we do this? People need knowledge. Illiterate people are easily duped. Do not be lazy.*

I think this association between being cheated and being uneducated is linked to the Betsileo feeling that they were without *fahaizana*. These notions have their roots in the particular power relations inherent in the Malagasy encounter with European missionaries and colonists. Issues about gullibility, ignorance, progress and modernity were central to the politics of this encounter, both at the time and when I lived in Ambohipo. When talking to villagers about this encounter, I found the topic of *fahaizana* to be central to their construction of its politics. Rajean-Ba, a regular church-goer, criticised the missionaries for 'denigrating' (*manambany*) Malagasy religious knowledge and practices such as the worship of idols. The schoolmaster, Rantoine, complained that the missionaries killed off Malagasy *fahaizana*, and replaced it with their own. He described this as a kind of brainwashing: 'They sank it into the heads of the Malagasy that European knowledge was the good one.'

Larson (1997) shows how it was particularly the knowledge and practices of diviners, healers and guardians of the idols that was denigrated by the missionaries, as they sought to replace what they saw as pagan superstition with Christian faith and reason. To achieve this end, Larson argues, they appropriated the Malagasy term '*fahaizana*', and applied it to the set of European knowledges (literacy, medicine, and technology) which they promoted through the mission schools. Christian school knowledge was posited as 'true knowledge', and this is what *fahaizana* came to represent (Larson 1997:987). This term was perhaps more apt than the missionaries appreciated, for the Malagasy word already contained connotations of foreignness and restricted access. In fact, foreign provenance is an inherent characteristic of the category '*fahaizana*': it is not simply technical knowledge, but a rather abstract and intellectual knowledge originating from circumscribed arenas. That is why it was used by the Malagasy themselves to describe the knowledge of diviners and healers. This knowledge was itself foreign in origin, having been adopted from Arab astrology (Deschamps 1972:71), and exclusive to certain initiated practitioners. Likewise, the guardianship of idols was controlled (through inheritance) by certain groups to whom it gave political privilege (Berg 1986). As Lambek (1993:220) has shown for Comorian astrologers, the exclusivity of their knowledge makes it powerful, mystifying and morally dubious. The fact that for the Malagasy '*fahaizana*' connoted exclusivity, mystification, alien origin, and moral-free potency made it an excellent term for them to apply to the new European school knowledge. The missionaries did not so much appropriate the term '*fahaizana*' for their own knowledge, as cast that knowledge into an existing mould offered by the Malagasy themselves. The irony of this missionary involvement in the politics of knowledge is that divinatory knowledge, due to its opposition to European *fahaizana*, assumed a stronger association with Malagasy culture than it had ever previously held (see Chapter Eight). The realignment of the term along European lines does not imply capitulation to or indoctrination by the ideological intentions of

Europeans. Rather, it shows that both sides were involved in an act of creative lexicography.

The term also fitted very well with colonial ideas about knowledge, or at least with Malagasy constructions of those colonial ideas. As Rajean-Ba commented: ‘The French told us that they alone had *fahaizana*. *Fahaizana* was working in an office, flying an aeroplane, being a teacher. You got *fahaizana* from school with a diploma.’

Diplomas - and the examination success required to obtain them - were the means by which the colonial government selected its administrative auxiliaries. In this way, examinations sanctioned a social definition of knowledge (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977:142), as acquisition of school *fahaizana* became established as the criterion for participation in colonial society. The colonial post-exam order of merit - which, as we saw above, persisted in post-colonial school practice - represented in the placement of students’ bodies the fact of differentiation by *fahaizana*: the assimilable wheat was physically separated from the excluded chaff. Not only did *fahaizana* come from France, but it also led there. So the diploma system was a critical factor in both social differentiation and displacement, as those who succeeded at school emigrated to a more prosperous life of government employment in the non-Betsileo world of the *vazaha* and the Merina. If anything, their social advantage grew after independence as higher levels of education and higher status employment became available. The pattern was the same throughout tropical Africa, where, in British and French (ex-) colonies alike, education and civil service examinations provided the impetus behind both the creation of new elites (Lloyd 1966) and the maintenance of old inequalities.

Liver-thieves

The link between the acquisition of school *fahaizana* and socio-economic differentiation contained a moral dimension. Although wealth and success through education brought honour to the ancestors

and the *tanindrazana*, the fact that it was acquired by means of a quintessentially unancestral, amoral, esoteric and foreign knowledge was problematic. One form which this concern took was tales of blood- and liver-thieves. The basic premise of these tales as I heard them in Ambohipo was that liver-, blood- and heart-thieves preyed upon Malagasy children to steal their body parts as a means of enriching themselves. *Vazaha* in particular were suspected of this, as any *vazaha* who has visited rural Madagascar and heard the cries of ‘Mpaka-fo!’ from the children can testify. The accusation was also made against wealthy, educated Malagasy, who could be identified as blood-thieves by their western habits and dress; it was never made against the rural poor. When I asked Ignace - who had just left school, aged 16 - why *vazaha* should want to steal human organs, he answered that it was because they knew how to make expensive medicine from them, and this is what made them rich. In this rather macabre Just-So story the wealth of the *vazaha* was explained in terms of *fahaizana* and an accompanying moral corruption. Only those people with access to that specific canon of esoteric knowledge could get rich in this way. The stories worked very well as an explanation of social differentiation: it was through understanding the incomprehensible knowledge of the *vazaha*, and through adopting their ways, dress and lack of morals that some villagers got richer than others. The school was the means to all these things. Wealthy, educated villagers knew that their prosperity risked them being suspected - if not openly accused - of organ-theft; even if the knowledge was not obscure to them, they still faced the moral stigma of involvement with the exploitative ways and knowledge of *vazaha*; dressing in western clothes and affecting western mannerisms also fed that suspicion. On the other hand, spending money on tombs in the ancestral village was one way of demonstrating their adherence to the moral order of Betsileo ancestors, and therefore distancing themselves from such malicious accusations.

Such tales are common in Africa, India and Latin America. Anthropological analyses tend to focus on the corporeal aspects of the

phenomenon. The fashionable tendency to see society inscribed in the body has led to its interpretation in terms of the commoditisation of the person (e.g. Weiss 1998; Scheper-Hughes 2000). To take this approach in the Malagasy case would be misplaced, for the discourse on blood- and liver-thieves is not primarily about the body, but about knowledge. In its own macabre imagery, this phantasmagoric folk theory of knowledge confronts the central problem of social differentiation in Sahamadio, namely that wealth came from a kind of knowledge antithetical to ancestral morality, and was conferred upon the kind of people most removed from it. While morality came from within the *tanindrazana*, wealth came from without. Each required the acquisition of a kind of knowledge specific to that place. Betsileo *fomba* was local and moral, but not remunerative. *Fahaizana* was remunerative, but amoral and foreign.

Conclusion

The central contention of this chapter is that the Betsileo cultural construction of schooling is best understood in terms of a close relationship between knowledge, place and morality. For the people of Ambohipo, different kinds of knowledge came from, or belonged to, different social and moral environments. I have shown how Ambohipo's schools operated as realms of activity distanced spatially and socially from village life. We have seen this in the physical location of the school, as well as in its customs and forms of conduct, the use of French as the language of instruction, and the provenance of the knowledge taught. The legacy of colonial schooling was that, even forty years into independence, the school still persisted as an environment for learning practices and knowledge from a non-local, non-ancestral world. The school presented to children both the ways of that world and a way into it.

While the difference between school and village practice was striking to me as an ethnographer, it was not something that villagers particularly remarked upon or worried about. The disciplinary regimes, the hierarchies of performance and the social codes of the

school did not find their way into normal village practice, but remained a normal feature of the particular social environment of the school. There was no need to resist the conventions of a self-contained institution. Yet I do not feel that the quiet acceptance of these conventions is evidence that villagers were tacitly led into a 'misrecognition' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977) of the power relations implied in schooling. The people of Ambohipo realised the educational and economic value of acquiring school knowledge, and so complied selectively with the 'customs of the school' in order to achieve that end. Rather than being the unwitting dupes of a putative ideological message encoded in that practice, they reflected on the social and cultural implications of their engagement with schooling. The school ideology did not construct the villagers' attitudes; on the contrary, they placed their own constructions on it.

There was, however, a marked generational difference in the local perception of the school. The older generation, who had lined up under the *tricolore* to sing 'Allons, enfants de la patrie', were more aware than the young of the wider political implications of schooling, its role in social differentiation and its challenge (as they saw it) to 'Malagasy customs'. This is partly because they had experienced colonialism, and then later been exposed to the nationalist political rhetoric of the Second Republic, which had roundly rejected French values. It was also due to the fact that as people aged they became more attached to the notion of tradition. Ambohipo's youth, on the other hand, recognised the personal advantages of school without yet being fully aware of its wider social and cultural ramifications. Young people tended to see schooling as the chance for the fulfilment of their own projects and ambitions. These often involved opportunities for travel outside the *tanindrazana*. As we saw, one student hoped that his going to school would help him find his way around if he went to Europe. For older people, that distancing of the youth from the land and the ways of the ancestors was intrinsically dangerous: it could lead to them forgetting both. The words of Razorza are again appropriate here: 'The further they proceed in school, the more they are influenced

by customs from abroad, and the things that make them Malagasy are forgotten.’

In Chapter Six I described the *tanindrazana* as a moral environment. Its morality lay in its associations with the morally venerated ancestral past inherited in the landscape and the forms of social conduct known as *fomba*. I showed how *fomba* was learned through practice, and contrasted the untrained, unpredictable nature of children with the stable and regulated disposition of adults, particularly elders. As these moral ancestral ways could only be learned in the moral environment of the *tanindrazana*, those young people pursuing the trajectory of schooling away from the village to the city missed out on the opportunity to learn them. As the domain of the ancestors, the *tanindrazana* was more closely associated with elders and their ways than with young people, who lacked the elders’ moral authority. In fact, it was expected of young people, especially men, that they would leave the valley to seek their fortunes in other social and moral environments. This was a common financial strategy for young men and women preparing for marriage and the founding of a household. For example, a group of young men from Ambohipo regularly made the arduous trip into the forest to buy illicit rum to sell in the village. Others borrowed money to buy second-hand clothes, which they hoped to sell in the booming mining towns of the southwest. Young men also found work in the northwest as sawyers; women as cotton-pickers. Trade, speculation and risk were the lot of youth, and were principally associated with activities outside the *tanindrazana*. These activities required the application of the social and technical knowledge peculiar to those places.

Schooling, then, fitted very well into this pattern of youthful activities. It involved the acquisition of non-local skills, and took young people into a world unregulated by the moral precedents of the *tanindrazana*. It was potentially financially rewarding, though something of a gamble, as there could be no guarantee of employment. In these ways - rather than simply because the government enforced attendance - the school was the natural realm of the young. This is

why parents did not worry unduly about the influence on their children of the particular pedagogic regimes of the school: it was expected of young people that they should venture into social environments characterised by other ways of behaving; and it was quite normal for young people to do and learn non-ancestral things in non-ancestral environments. Having no social theory of embodied knowledge or the 'political economy of the body', Ambohipo's parents and teachers did not worry that lining up in rows before a flag would insidiously discipline their children in the dispositions of French society. This does not mean that the regimes of discipline and behavioural practices of the school did not influence the children and did not make them more disposed to the social conventions of life outside the *tanindrazana*, merely that within the confines of the village school these conventions were unproblematic because they were expected - the school was after all a national government institution embedded in a local rural situation. Once school was over for the day, children and teachers resumed normal social interaction seemingly unaware of the transition. As long as they grew up to be responsible Betsileo adults, well versed in ancestral *fomba*, then villagers felt they only stood to benefit from the school.

However, schooling differed significantly from venturing into the forest to smuggle rum, or other adventurous youthful schemes, in one significant way: the displacement involved was usually long-term, rather than occasional, periodic or seasonal. Young people who speculated in these short ventures outside the valley usually expected to return home to settle. There - it was hoped - they would raise descendants for their ancestors and slowly grow into old, staid and predictable elders, immersed in the moral certainties of the *tanindrazana*. Schooling, on the other hand, frequently led to life-long absence from the *tanindrazana*, and prolonged contact with the morally dubious world of the *vazaha*. The fear of elders and parents, as we saw, was that this contact with foreign influence would lead to the loss of 'Betsileo ways'.

This was not just a vague rhetorical notion; it could be real and personal. One educated *ampielezana*, visiting his family over Christmas, told me that he disapproved of tomb rituals and the wrapping of ancestors. As an agronomist, he questioned how Madagascar could escape from poverty when its rural population indebted itself in pursuit of lavish feasting it could not afford. Listening to our conversation was the agronomist's mother. She had received a primary education, and had always lived in the village. She asked, 'Does that mean you won't care for me when I'm dead? Will you leave me cold [i.e. not wrap my body in new shrouds]?' This was said with a weak smile, as if to check he was joking. But she was genuinely worried.

This example shows very clearly the dilemma of schooling for the older generation. The agronomist's parents had invested in his school fees in order that he might support them in their old age and beyond, only to find that his educational career had led him into a moral environment that questioned the basis of Betsileo ritual practice - the ceremonial care of ancestors. Education was the route to wealth and success, but it posed a challenge to the moral order of the ancestors. As I have indicated, adults concerned themselves with this moral order far more than children did. If this chapter has examined the local construction of schooling principally from an adult perspective, it is because parents and teachers were far more explicit about their attitudes to schooling and society than were children, and their views were far more developed. But at the same time, children's ideas about ancestors were informed partly through leaving the ancestral land in pursuit of other ways and knowledges. In this sense, education was instrumental to their growing awareness of the moral significance of the *tanindrazana*.

Discussing the relationship between state education and regional identity in rural France, Reed-Danahay (1996:30) uses the phrase 'cultural disglossia' to describe how villagers selectively participate in national institutions such as the school while at the same time actively reinforcing local identity and social life. This is a similar

process to the one I have described in Ambohipo, where the school was embraced as a source of opportunity but also as a source of danger against which the positive moral attributes of the *tanindrazana* were posited. Local identity and the social life of the ancestors were affirmed in contradistinction to the wider social world represented in the village by the school. Indeed, it was because of Ambohipo's widespread and profitable association with the dubious moral realm of the school that the notion of the *tanindrazana* as the site of moral ancestral practice was promoted so strongly. That is why, when I asked people about the school, it was never long before they started talking about the ancestors. And that is why schoolteachers (such as Razorza and Rantoine) were amongst the greatest advocates of ancestral values: as purveyors of *fahaizana*, they were more aware than anyone of its moral vacuity.

The ambivalence of schoolteachers towards their professional role is characteristic of the ambiguous role of education in Sahamadio. The school, as I have shown, was a foreign presence in the valley, full of the remnants of colonial power relations; yet for all this, the school stood in the heart of the *tanindrazana*, and the success of its pupils had become central to the character of the region of Fisakana. Some Ambohipo families had been involved in education and government over four generations: their ancestors were not farmers, but teachers and doctors. As I showed in Chapter Five, it was such families who were most potently active in ancestral rituals and practices of *lanonana* and tomb-building. So, at the same time as standing in opposition to the *tanindrazana*, the school was fundamental to its constitution. In the final chapter I examine the make-up of the *tanindrazana* as a notion and as a place, and argue that it was constructed both by opposition to non-ancestral ideas and practices, and also through absorption of them. The role of knowledge, education and socio-economic differentiation in this process are central to the argument.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Rabera was the local diviner (*mpimasy*), though he described himself as a ‘Malagasy healer’ (*mpitsabo gasy*). He lived in the next village, Milamaina, in a dark house next to the church. I had arranged to visit him on Thursday, as it was his day off. Since Thursday was a taboo day he could not work, and the ancestors would only be angry with him if he tried to communicate with them: Thursday was a good day to talk to anthropologists. I called up from below his balcony and he beckoned me up the ladder into a narrow cluttered sitting room dominated by a blaring radio and an extraordinary cowhide three piece suite. I had never seen anything like it in Sahamadio, and assumed it was some kind of esoteric furnishing peculiar to diviners, but it turned out simply to have been purchased in a Pakistani furniture emporium in Antananarivo in the 1970s.

When he had turned down the radio, Rabera explained that there were two kinds of Malagasy medicine: one was beneficial and was used for healing, the other was detrimental and used in bewitching. Similarly, there were two kinds of *mpimasy*: those who used their knowledge for good and for curing, and those who used it for evil and for harm. Rabera said he was a good *mpimasy* who only used his knowledge in curing those who had fallen victim to the ill will of those using evil medicine; he also advised on the correct placement and orientation of tombs and houses, and divined the appropriate day for holding exhumation ceremonies.

Not everybody, however, believed that *mpimasy* divided so neatly into two categories. For example, when Raivony’s mother came to him in a dream to warn him that his half-brother’s children had put bad medicine in his ricefield in order to bring lightning upon his house, Raivony went straight to the *mpimasy* for an antidote. The antidote was effective and he was untroubled by lightning, but suspected that this was because the original curse and the antidote had

come from the same *mpimasy*: knowledge of the cure implied familiarity with the cause. In other words, for Raivony, *mpimasy* were morally ambiguous, capable of using their knowledge for good or for ill.

Much of Rabera's work involved treating any aches, swelling, or general poor health which were attributable to the agency of an ill-wisher. Siza, a young mother from Ambohipo, came to him complaining of a swollen breast; she had been referred to Rabera by the midwife, who said she could not treat it as it was clearly a case of witchcraft. In order to prescribe the correct medicine, it was necessary first to divine the identity of the person whose actions had caused the swelling.

Rabera explained to me how he performed such divinations. His divination tools consisted of a tin plate from China and a few French coins dating from the early colonial period. He put water in the plate with the coins and then called upon the ancestors to show him the face of the malefactor in the water. When this was revealed, he could prescribe a cure. In the case of Siza, he identified a woman who never usually talked to her, but who had tapped her on the elbow recently when inviting her to visit. Often, said Rabera, people asked for some bad medicine to use in retribution, but he never complied with such requests as he only prescribed good medicine.

Rabera kept his knowledge secret, fearing, he claimed, that it might fall into the hands of people who would misuse it. His knowledge had been inherited from his great-grandfather, via his grandfather and father. His own son did not want to be a diviner, but Rabera had a grandson who was already accompanying him on visits to patients and would one day take over the practice. Along with the knowledge that Rabera taught him, the grandson would also inherit the plate and coins at a special ceremony. Only then would he be able to hear the voices of the ancestors giving their diagnoses and suggesting the appropriate medicines.

Rabera stressed, however, that not all his knowledge was inherited. Like me, he pointed out, he was involved in research. He

had once been to Toliara where he had met a *mpimasy* from that region. They had instantly recognised each other as belonging to the same profession and had spent some time swapping tips on medicine. (He stressed that he never discussed medicine with non-*mpimasy*). His friend had described the powers of local medicines and had given him some to take home, warning Rabera not to use them in conjunction with goat fat as this would destroy their efficacy. I was interested to hear from Rabera that goat fat was a common preparation amongst local *mpimasy*, for ordinary people associated it very strongly with witchcraft.

Before I left, I asked Rabera what he did if he himself ever fell sick or suffered from pain. 'I usually take an aspirin,' he said.

Knowledge, place and morality

I have introduced this concluding chapter with a visit to Rabera because the figure of the diviner seems to characterise very well the ambiguous relationship between knowledge, morality and place in Malagasy culture. To explain what I mean by this statement it is necessary to know a little about the origins of Malagasy divination. The divinatory knowledge used by Rabera has a long and influential history in Madagascar. It was brought to Madagascar by Arabs who traded along the south-east coast between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. The ethnic group known as the Antaimoro claim to be descended from them. Their sacred texts are written in their own dialect of Malagasy using Arabic characters, and their system of divination is based on Arab astrology. The writing and the astrology formed an esoteric system of knowledge which had significant political influence in the history of pre-colonial Madagascar, as I shall describe below. Rabera's *fahaizana* is descended from the same origins, and his divinatory calendar used the pre-Islamic Arabic names for months and days. It is due to the astrological knowledge of those Arab traders that I went to see him on a Thursday.

From these decidedly non-Malagasy origins divinatory knowledge has managed to come to represent something

quintessentially Malagasy. As we saw in Chapter Seven, people in Ambohipo considered it an ancestral practice. Rabera also claimed an ancestral pedigree for his *fahaizana*. This is not simply due to a slow process of assimilation; it is also the result of a particular historical opposition to European knowledge. The early missionaries, in validating their own *fahaizana*, cast as dark and pagan the practices of divination and astrology which they associated with the Malagasy (Larson 1997). The polarisation of these two classes of knowledge was one of a range of opposed concepts that contrasted things Malagasy with things *vazaha*. In the cultural politics of the missionary encounter both parties were involved in this polarisation, which served to entrench divinatory knowledge as typically Malagasy, even though it was originally as exclusive and foreign as the new European knowledge.

I have used the example of divinatory *fahaizana* because it offers some parallels to the position of schooling in Betsileo society. In this chapter I show that the Betsileo conception of ancestral practice and knowledge was informed by the twin processes of opposition to ‘foreign’ knowledge and assimilation of it. While divinatory *fahaizana* has come to be considered ancestral practice of a sort, I question whether school *fahaizana* ever will. I demonstrate that although school *fahaizana* was a vital component in the creation of potent ancestry, it nevertheless remained opposed to the Betsileo conception of ancestral practice and knowledge.

I have shown in this thesis how Betsileo perceptions of formal education articulated around the relationship between knowledge, morality and place. I have described the salient opposition made by local people between the *tanindrazana* and the world beyond the valley. This opposition is featured in the more general distinction made between Madagascar and overseas (*an-dafy*), and Malagasy things and *vazaha* things (Bloch 1971:9-16). The reason for the importance of place is that the Betsileo, like most Malagasy, are always moving about, experiencing other moral and social environments. In Chapter Three I indicated the significance of

migration both as a general Malagasy phenomenon, and as a key factor in northern Betsileo society and culture. My discussion of migration focused on the tension felt by Ambohipo's people between the expatriating quest for prosperity, and the detaining attraction of the *tanindrazana*. This tension hinged upon the fact that while the *tanindrazana* was a source of blessing and protection, its economic potential was severely limited by overpopulation and low agricultural productivity. So the search for prosperity entailed a dilemma, especially for educated *ampielezana*, whose career paths involved them in the learning of knowledge and practices considered as alien to the moral environment of the *tanindrazana*.

Power, status and *fahaizana*

Recurrent in this thesis has been the observation that wealth, knowledge and influence from outside the *tanindrazana* have historically been central to its economic, social and ritual development. In Chapters Four and Five I demonstrated how it was those people most able to exploit their contact with external sources of wealth (such as the Church, government or formal education) who gained highest status in the *tanindrazana*. The principal characters in the history of the Twelve Men and Andriamilanja descent groups (see Chapter Two) were the succession of petty chiefs acting as the representatives of the Merina government in Sahamadio, such as Ravelona and Andriamarovala; these men have become venerated ancestors due to their renown and influence when alive. In Chapter Five I showed how it was men such as Raivony, who was able to pool the earnings of educated kin working outside the valley, who became ritually potent in the *tanindrazana*.

This is a common pattern in Malagasy history. The right to rule and high social status have always been dependent on external factors not available to ordinary people. In Madagascar these have tended to be non-local factors such as wealth, contact and alliance with influential outsiders, and foreign technical skill (*fahaizana*). As indicated above, Arab-based systems of writing and astrology had

significant political influence in the history of pre-colonial Madagascar, being closely linked to the legitimation of royal power. On the west coast they were instrumental in creating the aura of sacred power on which the Sakalava kingdoms of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were founded (Lombard 1973:6; Rabedimy 1983). In the highlands, the Betsileo kingdoms of the eighteenth century also employed diviners as advisors to their chiefs. The Merina king Andrianampoinimerina used Antaimoro astrologers to predict the propitious day for attacking his enemies in battle and to advise him on his successor. They chose his son Radama, and were charged with his education (Dez 1983). Under the patronage of the king, this knowledge was also influential at the Merina court in Antananarivo until it was displaced by the Latin alphabet introduced by the London Missionary Society in the early nineteenth century (Bloch 1968). The same relationship with *fahaizana* marked the reign of Radama, who skilfully adopted European literacy and numeracy to bolster his power base through the training of a bureaucratic and mercantile elite (see Chapter Four).

Access to *fahaizana*, and strategic use of it, has historically been fundamental to the acquisition and retention of power, wealth and influence in Madagascar. Much of the potency of *fahaizana* derives from its limited availability and close control. The account of my visit to Rabera at the beginning of this chapter describes how closely the diviner guarded his specialist knowledge. Although he claimed he was worried it could be used maliciously if it fell into the wrong hands, his secrecy was also motivated by economic considerations: business would suffer if divinatory *fahaizana* became common knowledge. But the esoteric nature of such knowledge made it morally suspect to ordinary people, who saw that it could be used to cure, but also to curse. As with school knowledge, and the accusations of liver-theft, knowledge not fully understood could not be fully trusted. The fact that Rabera alone knew the secrets of his trade gave him potentially unchecked influence over his patients and fellow

villagers. Rabera's repeated assertion that he only practised 'good' medicine shows an awareness of this suspicion.

Ancestralising *fahaizana*

The problem for Rabera was how to allay the stigma of being involved in, and making a living from, the use of a morally questionable kind of knowledge. The same problem confronted wealthy educated *ampielezana*, who through their prosperity became vulnerable to accusations of liver-theft. The answer in both cases was to present oneself as an ancestrally approved person, aligning that esoteric potency with the mystical power and blessing of the ancestors. In Chapter Four I described the visit of a political candidate making pre-election propaganda in Milamaina. He impressed the local electorate less by his political programme than by his obvious association with sources of wealth, a fact illustrated by a cortège of three saloon cars. Yet he was careful to balance this show of wealth and urbanity with a demonstration of his local ancestral connections. He achieved this by asking a blessing from the village elders, a deft political move which effectively gave the local ancestral stamp of approval to a character ostensibly steeped in the non-ancestral trappings of Europe and government. Not everyone present was convinced by this. As the candidate stood solemnly facing the elders while they doused him and his half-Pakistani wife with blessed water, a heckler called out derisively: 'Why don't you make a proper job of it and say a prayer in the church as well?'

This deliberate domestication of foreign potency via association with ancestral blessing can also be seen in the tendency of diviners to claim ancestral precedent for their profession, to claim it as something quintessentially Malagasy, and to claim to be experts in local ancestral traditions (Wilson 1992:138) - all the while keeping the knowledge restricted. The mayor of Milamaina, Rapaoly (see Chapter One), can be seen in the same light. A self-taught expert in property law, he frequently represented villagers in land disputes at the state tribunal, taking payment in land if he won. His success lay in his

ability to access and manipulate a particular branch of *fahaizana* lying beyond the comprehension of the less educated peasants whose suits he fought. Rapaoly was in effect a kind of diviner. His potency and wealth came from his association with a powerful, enriching, though rather murky world very different from the practical moral certainties of everyday life. Yet, like a diviner, Rapaoly ancestralised this foreign and mystifying power by presenting himself as a paragon of ancestral knowledge: he kept the book of the history of the Twelve Men, and he was renowned for his oratorical skill and his stock of ancestral proverbs.

The building of tombs by successful *ampielezana*, which I described in Chapter Five, represents a similar process of identification. By converting the wealth earned in the non-ancestral, amoral exterior into a stable edifice of the ancestral order (Bloch 1989), *ampielezana* bought their way into local ritual status whilst at the same time allaying allegations of involvement in liver-theft. These were the only people with the financial capability to build tombs in Sahamadio; cultivators who had no external source of income could not afford to build, and so had to continue to bury in old overcrowded tombs. Thus the most ritually potent people in the *tanindrazana* were successful educated *ampielezana*, who dealt in the non-ancestral ways and knowledge of the *vazaha*. Their ritual position as funders of tombs and heads of tomb groups put them in a position to accrue the blessing of the Sahamadio ancestors, which was channelled through the tomb. Controlling the source of blessing confirmed and solidified their ritual authority and social status. In the same way, the power of the Merina and Sakalava royal families was based upon their connections to, and association with, the royal ancestors (Feeley-Harnik 1978; Bloch 1987). The educated *ampielezana* of Sahamadio converted their economic capital into social and ritual status by building tombs and hosting *lanonana* for local ancestors. In this way the social and economic differentiation created by unequal success in education was sanctioned and sanctified through control of ancestral ritual and blessing. As they honoured the ancestors, so they garnered further

blessing and achieved greater prosperity. The words of an educated Merina villager are apt here: 'I have land here, there and everywhere. This proves that if you are held in high regard by an ancestor, it helps you in life.' (quoted by Raison-Jourde 1999:300).

The paradox of social and ritual status in Sahamadio was that the ritually potent individuals and best remembered ancestors were those people who made and profited from contacts outside the *tanindrazana*, who embraced foreign *fahaizana* and turned it to economic advantage. According to Radolphe's ancestral history, Andriamarovala was the first person to bring rice cultivation to Sahamadio (see Chapter Two). By exploiting the new technology and carefully trading his stocks of seed for livestock, Andriamarovala became rich enough to attempt to purchase the ritual status of *andriana*, which he would have achieved were it not for one stray goose. Despite this setback he became a celebrated local ancestor in the Andriamilanja patriline. The local businessman and politician who built a huge tomb beside the valley road to Miadanimerina is a more recent example of the same pattern. The remarkable tombs in Sahamadio when I lived there were all built - or being built - by such people. In Ambohipo, the Ravalitera family used the capital accrued over three generations of civil service employment to enable them to break away from the village's dilapidated main tomb, founding in the process their own segmented patriline. This was the pattern for the founding of new descent groups: social differentiation in life created segmentation amongst the dead, perpetuating the memory of significant ancestors at the head of named descent groups, and leaving others undifferentiated in an anonymous commonality.

The vitality and volatility of *fahaizana*

Fahaizana, then was a crucial constituent in social, economic and ritual differentiation in Sahamadio. As we saw in Chapters Six and Seven, *fahaizana* was opposed in the Betsileo folk epistemology to the Betsileo *fomba* characteristic of the moral environment of the *tanindrazana*. Yet it was a fundamental constituent of ancestral

potency, far more potent than mundane local *fomba*, whatever their ancestral associations. While practising *fomba* in the *tanindrazana* was morally approved behaviour, it was not the way to achieve ancestral status. Although the observance of Betsileo *fomba*, deference to seniors and ancestors, simple politeness and modest demeanour were all qualities closely associated with ancestral society, they were not enough in themselves to create potent ancestors able to bestow blessing and fertility. *Fahaizana* and *fomba*, although opposed in terms of provenance and moral orientation, were both important constituents of the *tanindrazana*; but as we have seen, the dangerous amoral foreignness of the former had to be transformed into the safe parochial morality of the latter.

In Chapter Seven I showed how the acquisition of *fahaizana* was associated with young people and non-ancestral environments such as the school. *Fahaizana* was associated with Europe, with change, and with a lack of moral orientation. In this way it was akin to the potent vitality and volatility of young people themselves. Bloch (1986; 1999) argues that the blessings conferred by the ancestors in Merina and Zafimaniry ritual are not complete without the element of raw, wild and antisocial vitality which the ancestors lack and the young have in abundance. A young Zafimaniry man who commits an act of sacrilegious vandalism is sent away to earn the money to pay a fine in rum and cattle, which the elders then consume at a ritual to annul the sacrilege. Through the imposition of the fine and the consumption of this rum and meat, the elders harness the youthful vigour and transform the dangerous volatility into blessing for the whole community (Bloch 1999).

In Sahamadio, *fahaizana* provided the vitality necessary to the constitution of potent ancestors and thus to the creation of effective blessing. But it was a potentially disruptive force requiring moral anchorage. This was expressed to me by an old man from Ambatolahy through the idiom of the three hearthstones. 'A hearth must have three stones in it,' he said. 'We need progress (*fandrosoana*), and we need knowledge (*fahaizana*). But we also need wisdom (*fahendrena*).

Without the third stone, the cooking pot will fall over.’ Just as *fahaizana* was the province of the youth, so was *fahendrena* (wisdom) the province of the elders. In this view - typical of elders - the vital force of the former had to be balanced by the circumspection and judgment of the latter.

The creation of *fomba*

Having considered the role of school *fahaizana* and foreign knowledge in constituting ancestral potency in the land of the ancestors, I now turn to its role in creating a socially constructed notion of Betsileo *fomba*. Rather than being a process of absorption or ancestralisation, this was much more one of opposition.

In Chapter Seven I described the historical background to the northern Betsileo impression that they had no *fahaizana* of their own. The missionary and colonial provision of schooling were founded on the premise of a one-way transmission of knowledge from the knowing *vazaha* to the ignorant Betsileo. The notion that it was through contact with the world and ways of the *vazaha* that the Betsileo could gain the knowledge they lacked was still common when I lived in Ambohipo. Villagers’ relationship to formal education was very much shaped by this impression. One way of talking about not having *fahaizana* was a discourse on the kind of knowledge, practice and morality considered particular to the Betsileo. Indeed the valley’s large scale involvement in schooling - that is to say, in a system of knowledge belonging to a foreign moral order - was largely responsible for the hyper-traditional ideas of Betsileo *fomba* and the ‘time of the ancestors’ that I heard expressed so frequently in Ambohipo. The idea of Betsileo *fomba* was created in opposition to the ways and knowledge of the *vazaha*, of which the school and its educated products were constant reminders.

Although education was necessary and enriching, the fact that it led to, and originated from, the world of the *vazaha* made its acquisition problematic. I think it was made even more problematic by the heightened idealistic notion of the *tanindrazana* to which it was

opposed. In Chapter Six I showed how the notion of ‘the time of the ancestors’ was used as a critique of post-colonial Betsileo society. The portrayal of a golden age when the community participated in feats of communal labour served as a foil to the highly differentiated and dispersed society of the present. The evocation of an ideal past meant that the unpleasant reality of the present need not be directly confronted. In a society where inequality in status and wealth was not usually referred to, the talk of the ‘time of the ancestors’ provided the suitable idiom in which to make allusion to the extreme socio-economic disparities caused by schooling and the colonial experience.

The one time when this co-operative ideal became a reality was in the process of tomb building described in Chapter Five. The building party revelled in the fact that this was co-operative work (*firaisan-kina*), and the fact that this was ancestral practice was constantly pointed out to me. Regardless of my presence, the activity was still self-consciously ancestral: there were frequent libations of rum, measured speeches about the unity of the community, songs about the strength of communal work. This whole display of ancestral rhetoric was of course linked to the fact that we were building a tomb, but the co-operative dynamic of the task was particularly emphasised because communal work did not occur in the context of agricultural activity. The self-conscious traditionalism of the tomb-building was a creation of the circumstances of the usually unco-operative present.

Just as co-operative endeavour was seen as the hallmark of ancestral society, so was the practical and moral knowledge of Betsileo *fomba* described in Chapter Six. In Chapter Seven, I showed how parents worried that learning *fahaizana* at school would lead to their children leaving the *tanindrazana* and forgetting the moral knowledge that they considered the legacy of the ancestors. Although, as I argued in Chapter Three, the Betsileo have a history of migration, I think that the involvement with education which characterised the colonial period created displacement on an unprecedented scale and of an unprecedented kind. It created a set of people absent for long periods from the *tanindrazana*, socially and economically

differentiated from its population, yet able to return periodically to maintain family and spiritual ties. It was partly in response to the creation of a new kind of Betsileo migrant, swinging between two moral environments, that the notion of Betsileo ancestral *fomba* in the form of everyday practices of courtesy became so prevalent. When I lived in Ambohipo, Betsileo *fomba* was opposed generally to the ways of the *vazaha*, but more specifically to the ways adopted from the *vazaha* by the frequently returning educated *ampielezana*.

This is not to suggest that those forms of conduct did not exist before the large scale involvement in the colonial education project. They surely did, though perhaps not in so immutable a form as they were represented to me. They existed in practice, but were not self-consciously spoken of in terms of an unchanging ancestral legacy. In this respect, *fomba* might be compared to Indonesian *adat* - 'the universally accepted rules of proper social conduct [.....] imagined as historically continuous, culturally homogeneous, and ethnically discrete' (Steadly 1993:41). In Indonesia, as in highland Madagascar, the creation of a notion of tradition was largely a product of the colonial encounter. In Indonesia, *adat* has far greater political and intellectual prominence than *fomba* in Madagascar. In 'discovering' the Indonesian peasantry Dutch scholars constituted their own idea of Indonesian tradition, later to be adopted by nationalist movements as a political discourse and philosophy (Kahn 1993:71,126). In the latter context the social basis of *adat* has been mooted as the possible basis of future society. Tradition is frequently a response to modernity and change (Latour 1991), but it is not always manifest in the ritually elaborate forms contained in Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1992) well-known volume. In Fisakana, the discourse of tradition involved a restrained debate on the nature of knowledge.

The specific form that tradition took in Sahamadio was linked to the specifics of that colonial encounter. In Sahamadio this encounter took the form of the involvement of a substantial part of the population in formal schooling. In bringing formal education to Sahamadio, the missionaries - and later the French government -

imported a fixed set of ideas about what the Betsileo needed to know and learn. As the currency of the school was knowledge, it was natural that the the Betsileo notion of ancestral tradition should be framed in terms of what their children needed to learn. The common complaint of parents, as we saw in Chapter Seven, was that schoolchildren learned reading and writing and other academic skills, but they did not learn the kind of behaviour which would make them into good, wise Betsileo adults. It was because colonialism and modernity arrived in Sahamadio in the form of ideas about knowledge and learning that the oppositional formulation of Betsileo tradition was framed in those terms.

Opposition and assimilation

The construction of a notion of Betsileo ancestral knowledge opposed to the knowledge of the *vazaha* presents something of a paradox in Sahamadio. As I have shown, the involvement of the northern Betsileo in education extends over several generations, creating a local educational tradition for which Fisakana has become renowned. And as I demonstrated earlier in this chapter, it was educated *ampielezana* who were becoming ritually potent in the *tanindrazana* through the conversion of their *fahaizana* into economic capital and then into ritual capital through the building of tombs and the hosting of *lanonana*. However, given the polarised positions reflected in the Betsileo social construction of knowledge it seems unlikely that schooling could ever really come to represent a northern Betsileo ancestral practice. Yet other foreign forms have made this transition.

At the beginning of this chapter I showed how the *fahaizana* of the diviner became entrenched as an ancestral practice in contradistinction to the new *fahaizana* introduced by the missionaries. I also showed how legitimising it as such suited the interests of diviners, as they dealt in a morally dubious and potentially mystifying knowledge. Despite the educational tradition of Sahamadio, I never heard schooling referred to as an ancestral practice. The Church, on the other hand, made that transition many years ago. The tomb that

Raivony built was topped with a cross, and the inauguration ceremony was presided over by a Catholic priest. Flowers were placed on tombs on All Saints' Day. The ancestral histories of the Twelve Men tell of the initially troublesome encounter with the missionaries, yet when I lived in Ambohipo church attendance had become one of the ways of the ancestors.

The ancestral story of the Andriamilanjan descent group credits Andriamarovala with the introduction of rice cultivation to the valley. At the time it represented a new way of farming, a foreign *fahaizana*. Rice farming expanded in the valley under pressure from the Merina government in the nineteenth century. As I showed in Chapter Six, what was remembered in Sahamadio as a product of co-operation, was in fact a product of coercion. Yet nearly two hundred years later rice cultivation had become a defining cultural trait of the Betsileo, regarded as *fomba* rather than *fahaizana*. Just before I left the village I attended a talk in the *hopitaly* by a young agronomist training villagers in a new, more productive method of rice production. If it proves productive, it might well become a local practice, and eventually a local *fomba*. The line method, first introduced in the 1970s was already being used by a second generation of young farmers when I lived in Ambohipo.

Schooling has been productive, and has brought great wealth to the *tanindrazana*. But its entanglement with the displacement and differentiation of colonisation, and its formulation as diametrically opposed to Betsileo knowledge, seem to be preventing its adoption as an ancestral practice.

Perhaps it is too early to say. One important factor in this question is the state of the national economy. The boom years for schooling in Sahamadio were the 1950s and 1960s, a period of heavy colonial and post-colonial investment in the government sector. The huge national investment in education under the Second Republic created many jobs for Sahamadio's schoolteachers in the 1970s. But the financial crisis of the 1980s, and Madagascar's subsequent economic free fall, have hit public sector employees particularly hard.

There is no longer any security in schooling. Investment in school fees brings ever more meagre returns. Ambohipo's school and university graduates are no longer automatically swept up onto the government payroll. They now need greater foresight and strategy in planning their careers. Following the lead of Léonard, many have jumped aboard the rural development bandwagon. But for Sahamadio, as for Madagascar in general, the economic forecast is bleak. Unlike rice cultivation, unlike divining, unlike the Church, the days of schooling may already be past.

There is one tomb in Sahamadio which from the outside looks like any other. But inside it there is the corpse of a unique ancestor. It is the corpse of a local man who trained as a doctor and spent many years of his life practising medicine in France. Before he died he asked for his body to be embalmed and to be buried in the family tomb in an airtight coffin. The coffin has a small window, through which his face can be seen. I have seen a photograph of the coffin: the flesh on his face is still intact, his expression frozen in rigor mortis. Through his medicinal knowledge the doctor has defied the fate of other ancestors: whereas they will crumble into anonymity, being rolled and wrapped together into shrinking composite packages of unnamed bones, his body will remain resolutely individual and preserved. And with it, he hopes, his memory.

The doctor's photograph was passed around Ambohipo as a curiosity. It generated feelings of wonder and disgust in roughly equal measures. People sometimes came to me with it, assuming that I, as a *vazaha*, could explain the process that preserved the doctor. 'That's really some *fahaizana*', they would say, before adding quickly, 'but you know, that's not really our *fomba*.'

Perhaps there are some things that simply cannot be assimilated.

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Glossary

The following words are used repeatedly throughout the thesis. I have left them in Malagasy so that the reader might experience them in their full range of meanings.

ampielezana: ‘scattered’ person, i.e. migrant: used here of educated urban migrants.

fahaizana: technical skill or know-how.

fomba: ways, customs; but I argue here that *fomba* represents a kind of practical social knowledge.

lanonana: tomb ceremonies involving feasting and ancestral rites.

tanindrazana: the land of the ancestors: the word has multiple nuances and much rhetorical power.

vazaha: foreigner, particularly European; also used adjectively, especially in contrast to things Malagasy.